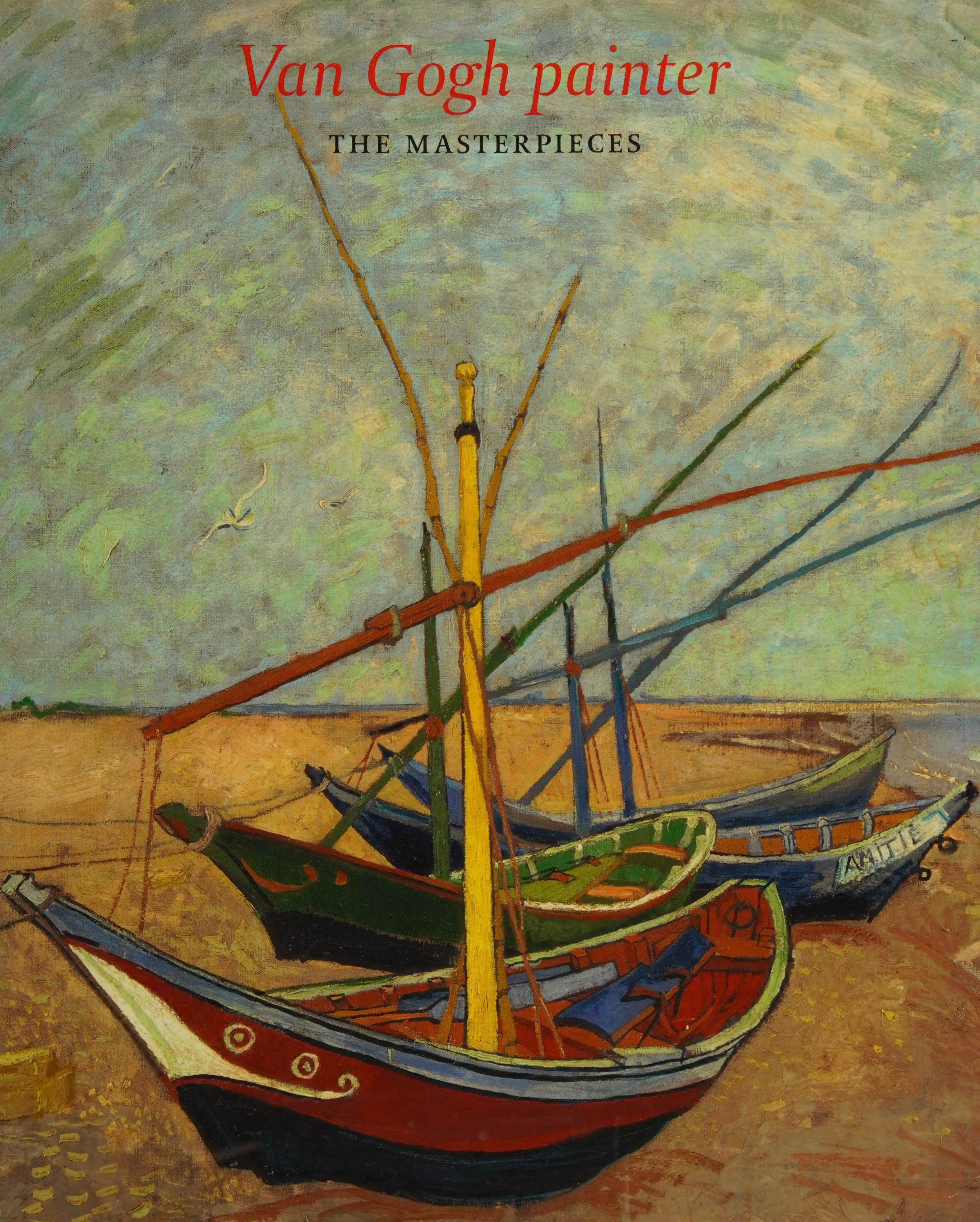
Van Gogh painter

THE MASTERPIECES



Known the world over, Vincent Van Gogh continues to exert a compelling fascination. This book exploring the artist's paintings has been devised as a companion to the well-received *Van Gogh draughtsman: The masterpieces* by Sjraar van Heugten.
It offers the reader a selection of the artist's most unforgettable canvases, as well as some lesser-known examples, drawn from the collection of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and elsewhere.
It explores the works in the context of Van Gogh's short but brilliant career, in which frequent spells of isolation did not preclude lively engagement with artistic peers and the ideas of his time. Van Gogh's brush was guided by a remarkable, restless and wide-ranging intelligence, which found its other outlet in the continuous stream of letters penned to family and friends. One of the most important archival resources of nineteenth-century art, the artist's correspondence provides the narrative thread around which this study develops. The author considers Van Gogh as a cosmopolitan figure who combined in his art the experiences and traditions he absorbed in his native Holland and in Belgium, and who then succeeded in assimilating and making his mark upon the practice of painting in France at one of the richest periods in the history of art.

BELINDA THOMSON has published extensively within the fields of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. She has made particular studies of Paul Gauguin, with whom Van Gogh famously enjoyed a sustained artistic dialogue, albeit one fraught with difficulties. In 2001 she was the author of the *Van Gogh* title in the 'Artists in Focus' series published by The Art Institute of Chicago. The author is an independent art historian living in Edinburgh.

Van Gogh draughtsman
THE MASTERPIECES

Van Gogh painter

THE MASTERPIECES

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Van Gogh painter

THE MASTERPIECES

BELINDA THOMSON

VAN GOGH MUSEUM | FONDS MERCATOR

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Foreword

The body of publications devoted to Vincent van Gogh has assumed enormous proportions over the years and covers an impressive number of subjects. However, anyone looking for accessible overviews that expertly yet succinctly throw light on the artist's work and reflect current thinking would be sadly disappointed. Readers are obliged to resort to libraries, for what is usually older literature, or be satisfied with books that provide a very superficial introduction.

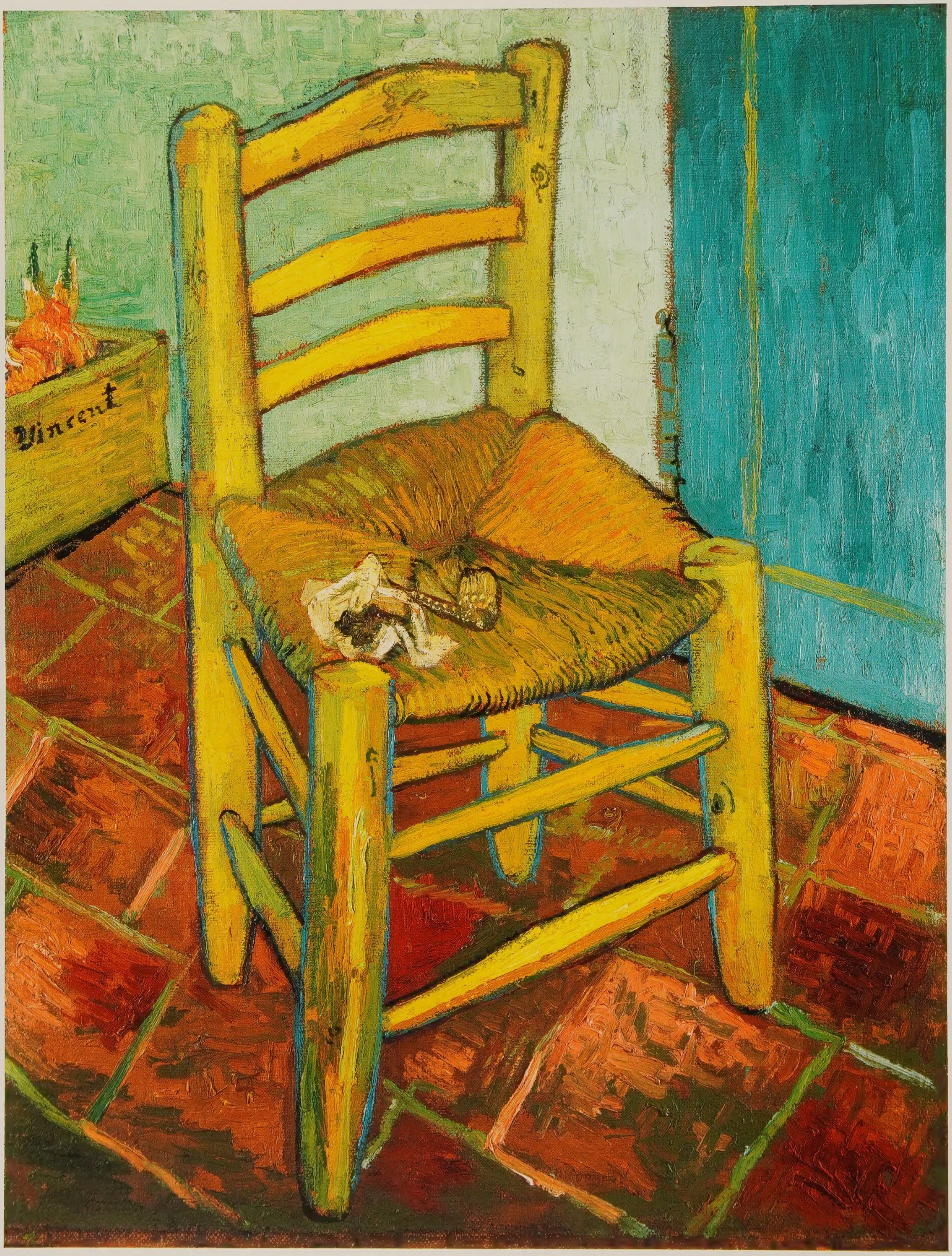
In 2005 the Van Gogh Museum published a general survey of Vincent van Gogh's drawings by Sjraar van Heugten, *Van Gogh draughtsman: The masterpieces*. In it Van Gogh's technical and artistic development – from hesitant beginner without much obvious talent to one of the most amazing draughtsmen in history – was revealed in an appealing way. It was obvious that the subject met a need; the book was translated into English, French, German and Italian and distributed throughout the world by important art book publishers. This confirmed our view that a similar publication about Van Gogh's paintings would be welcomed by the public.

This book is the fulfilment of that wish and, together with the earlier publication about the drawings, it provides a sound introduction to Van Gogh's work. The Van Gogh Museum approached Belinda Thomson, an internationally renowned authority on Impressionism and Post-Impressionism and the author of numerous publications. She selected the paintings by Van Gogh illustrated in the book and accompanied them with a lively, erudite text, which offers the reader great insight into the works themselves and also into their wider significance in Van Gogh's oeuvre. In the space of ten years Van Gogh developed from an old-fashioned artist who worked in the Hague School and Barbizon styles into one of the leading modernists of his time. This spectacular progression is often seen as a story in two parts. However, the connecting thread that links the early work to the late is at least as remarkable, and possibly even more revealing of Van Gogh's character as an artist. The book does equal justice to this continuity.

In the first place many thanks are due to Belinda Thomson who, at the request of my predecessor John Leighton, accepted the challenging commission with great enthusiasm and wrote a sparkling text. In the Van Gogh Museum the author received dedicated support from Sjraar van Heugten, Chris Stolwijk, Leo Jansen and Louis van Tilborgh on the academic staff. The Head of Publications, Suzanne Bogman, was also instrumental in the genesis of the book, and her department supported and encouraged all the phases of its realisation. The staff of Tijdsbeeld in Ghent and Mercatorfonds in Brussels were responsible for the production and international distribution of this beautiful publication.

We hope that readers throughout the world, who make, or perhaps renew, their acquaintance with Van Gogh, will be inspired by this painter of masterpieces.

AXEL RÜGER, Director Van Gogh Museum


Vincent

Introduction

The masterpieces of the great Dutch artist Vincent van Gogh make a unique impact. They present vibrant and instantly recognisable images. They speak in direct, clear, visual language. The very surface of the paint seems to reach out towards the viewer. Many reasons can be proposed to explain the phenomenon of Van Gogh's global popularity, but essentially it must come down to the immediately rewarding relationship that the person looking has with his work.

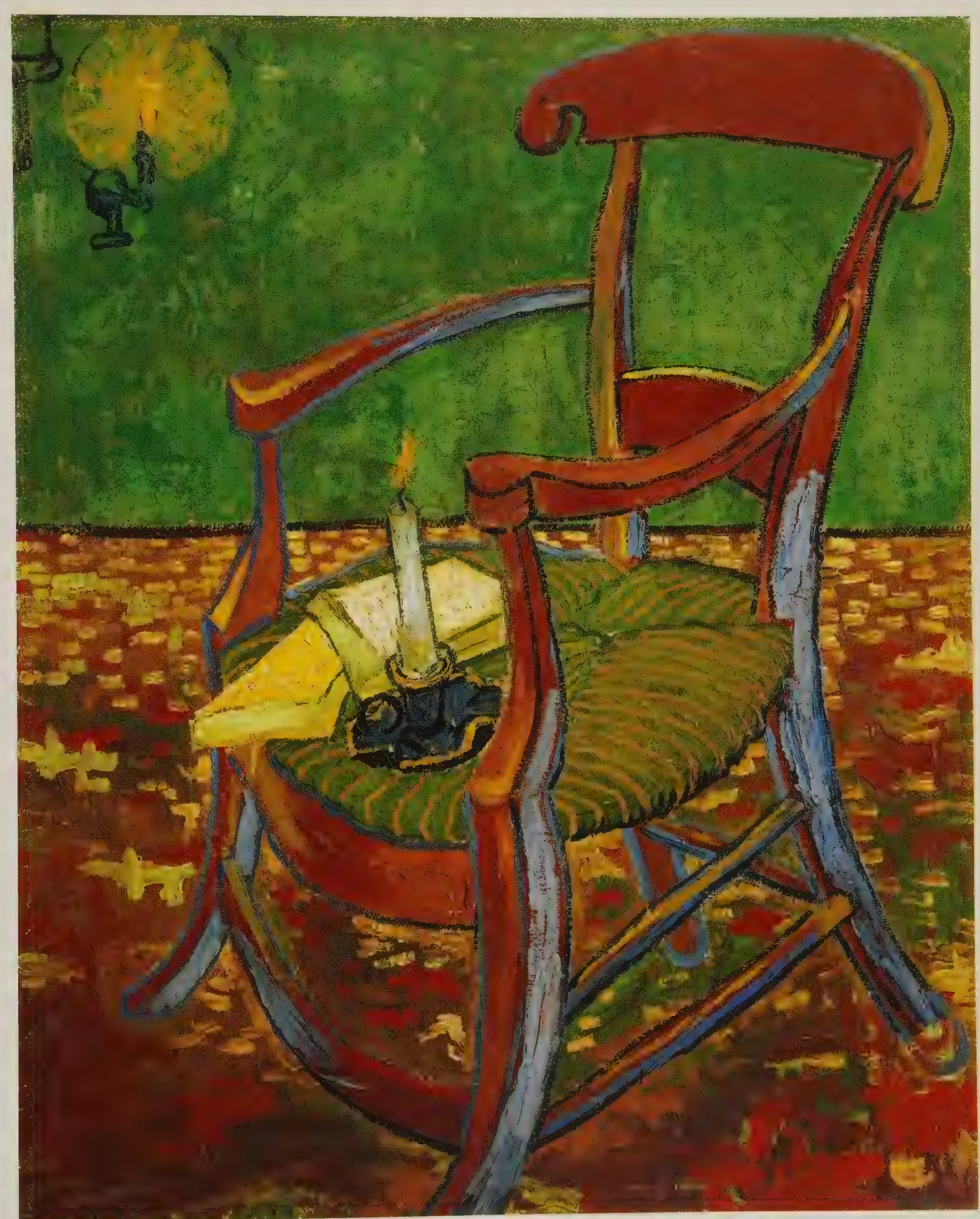
The point is readily made by *Van Gogh's chair* (ill. 1), a mature work of 1888 and today one of Van Gogh's best known, best loved paintings. Typically, it is a bold exercise in perspective: indeed, drawing plays just as important a role as colour. The four-square, solidly planted motif is seen at close quarters, the painter's salient brushstrokes faithfully following the strands of the rush seat and the grain of the wooden struts that join the chair legs at right angles. The roughness of the canvas and its coarse execution match the unpretentious, workaday character of the motif. The chair is typical of its setting in southern France, intimate and local; yet its very simplicity makes it a universal image. Basic wooden chairs of this type crop up in the early studies of working men and women Van Gogh made in his native Holland during the first half of the 1880s, at a time when he made it his purpose to celebrate humble, rustic, working lives, taking his inspiration from the graphic styles of English illustrated journals. But whilst the treatment of the subject remains true to his youthful ambitions, Van Gogh's use of colour has moved on. The palette is bright and clean, not muddy and tonal; the cool turquoise blues of wall and door contrast with the extraordinary range of yellows and warm rusty reds. More daringly, although there is no figure, the image manages to evoke the character of the user of the chair – the painter himself – through the simplest of details, a pipe and a screw of tobacco. Recalling his own emotion on seeing a drawing by Luke Fildes (1844-1927) of *The empty chair of Charles Dickens*, Van Gogh found a way of investing a simple motif with powerful associations. And although the painting stands alone, in the artist's mind it had a pendant, *Gauguin's chair* (ill. 2); indeed, Van Gogh liked to pit his works against one another in this way, conscious of the place each had in his steadily accumulating oeuvre. Both works represent empty chairs, but they have violently opposed colour harmonies, and this was Van Gogh's neat way of summarising the similarities, and yet separation, between two formidable artistic comrades.

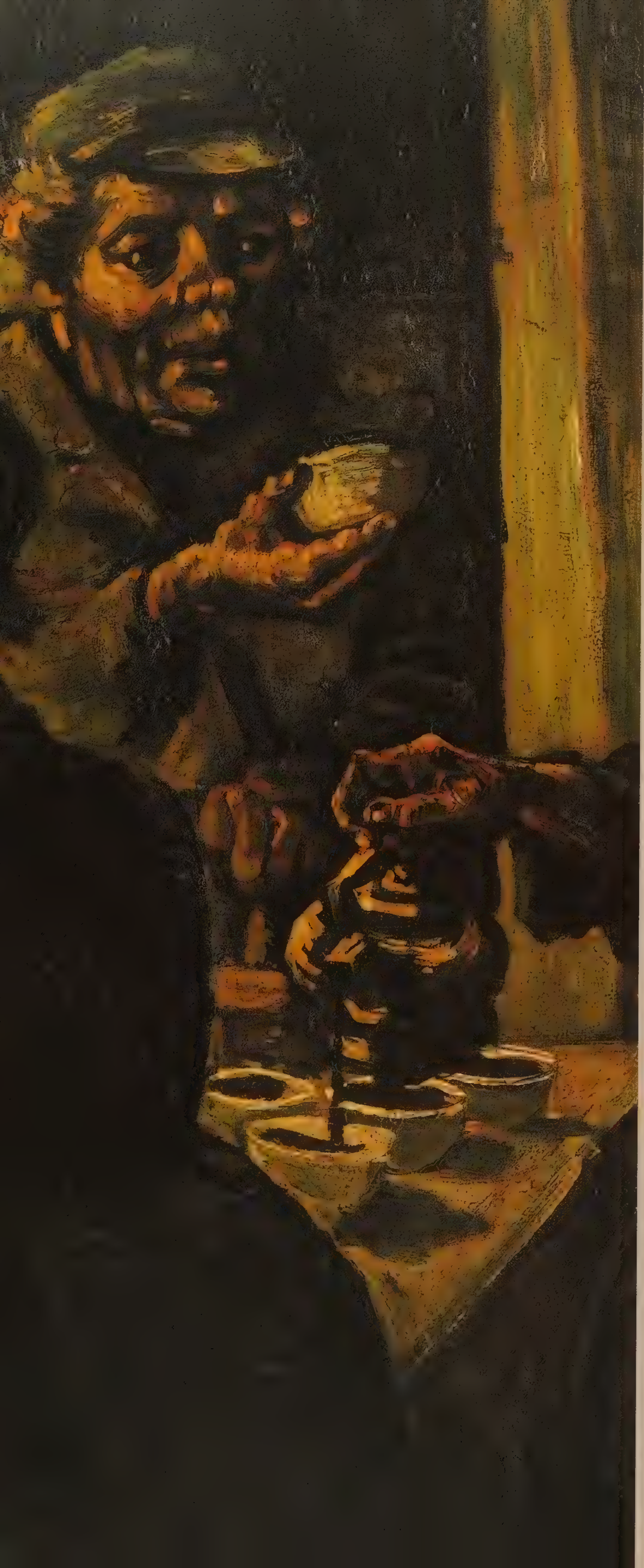
1
Van Gogh's chair
1888
oil on canvas
93 x 73 cm
National Gallery,
London

At many levels, then, *Van Gogh's chair* embodies Van Gogh's essential traits as a painter. On the level of a museum visit, it makes a direct appeal; its simplicity fulfils his original ambition of communicating with all humanity, educated and uneducated, young and old, rich and poor, regardless of nation or creed. Yet with a knowledge of the letters Van Gogh wrote throughout his career to his brother Theo and other correspondents, we understand how such paintings also work at a deeper level, often with a characteristic assemblage of meaning and association that makes a more indirect and suggestive appeal.

2
Gauguin's chair
1888
oil on canvas
90 x 72 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

Image and word work together in Van Gogh's case, as we shall see. Despite his images' seemingly easy and obvious conquest of a worldwide public today, for the artist himself that victory was hard won. His letters chart his struggles day by day. They form a remarkable testament, revealing a reflective, complex mind bringing all his experience to bear on the single-minded goal of producing art. In every situation Van Gogh gave of himself unstintingly, and, whilst doing so, he fortified his imagination through his wide and avid reading in ways that added value to the task. By the time he began making his first tentative essays in drawing at the age of twenty-six, he had already achieved a considerable degree of self-knowledge. In a soul-searching letter of 1880 to Theo, Van Gogh confessed to being 'a man of passions', with a tendency to speak overhastily and say things he regretted: 'Must I consider myself a dangerous man, incapable of anything? I don't think so. But the problem is to try every means to put those selfsame passions to good use.' [154/133] In celebrating his major paintings, this book seeks to trace the development of Van Gogh's convictions and decision-making, the goals he set himself, the influences he embraced, the limitations he accepted and the obstacles he overcame in order to paint them.





1853–1885

The Low Countries

Dutch roots and intellectual formation

VAN GOGH'S ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE as an artist was strengthened not weakened by his diverse early experiences. His various abortive career ventures – as art dealer, teacher and preacher – were not so much distractions from his ultimate purpose as simply false starts; each played its part in shaping his eventual destiny.

Born in 1853 in Zundert, Van Gogh grew up in the Brabant countryside. In a letter to Theo of 22 October 1882, he reflected on the advantages of this rural boyhood in 'surroundings that taught us to think more than is usual [...] precisely the quality one has to have in order to paint.' [274/237] He never lost his intense love of the countryside, where he felt more at home than in the city. In his artistic career, his passion for nature was frequently stirred by the scenes he witnessed on his walks, and his chosen landscape motifs were frequently tinged with nostalgia for some remembered scene of childhood. Van Gogh's analytic interest in and appreciation of nature started from the ground up and often began with the soil itself, its textures, colours and patterns. He retained something of the child's close-up viewpoint, and he took his gaze from individual insects to grasses and plants, observing how different flowers and trees grow. This attentiveness became a recurrent theme in his painted oeuvre.

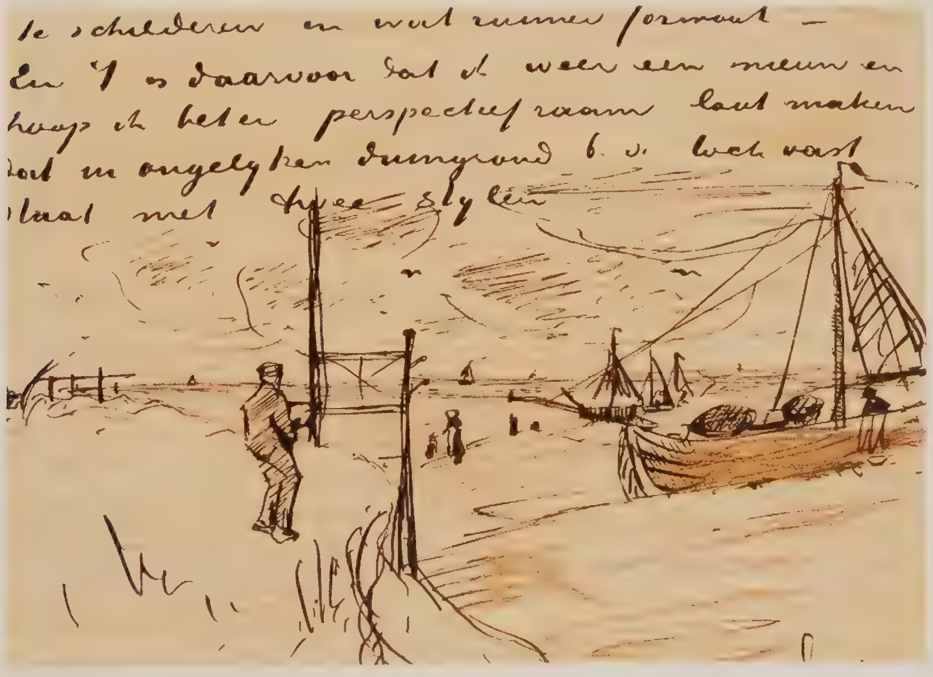
Van Gogh's stated determination to 'do some good' in the world, to serve some purpose, derived from his upbringing in a country parsonage and from the uplifting moral example of his parents. As members of the Dutch Reformed church, Theodorus and Anna van Gogh strove to live by Christian values. They also set a high value on education and reading. The Bible was central to their lives, and Van Gogh grew up respecting the value of a well-crafted sermon. But the family had important connections with the art trade too. Three of his uncles were art dealers, and his paternal uncle Vincent was a partner of the French firm Goupil et Cie. It was thus natural for the dreamy adolescent Vincent to be sent in 1869 to work at the firm's branch in The Hague.

The seven years he spent working with pictures as an art dealer's assistant were vital for Van Gogh in many ways. He got to know the work of established contemporary artists, who were Goupil's stock-in-trade, but he also developed his own tastes. His preference was for realist painting, landscape, peasant subjects and portraiture, genres which related directly to the great traditions of Dutch seventeenth-century painting, which he came to know in the major galleries of London, Paris and Holland. Van Gogh's assiduous image-collecting also began at this time. He compiled scrapbooks of prints and reproductions after works primarily by Dutch and French artists. This practice would lead on naturally, when he embarked upon his artistic career in The Hague, to his making collections of illustrations from past issues of such English journals as the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*. These resources were an invaluable store of visual and compositional ideas.

The Goupil firm sent him first to the London and then to the Paris office, and Van Gogh applied himself assiduously to mastering English and French. His facility with languages and the experience of living abroad widened both his intellectual horizons and his social contacts. The paradox is that, while fully embracing his identity as a Dutchman, as a painter Van Gogh never limited himself to that identity, consistently seeking to position himself, through his reading and, later, through his associations, within a more international artistic context. And while he shunned the usual patterns of establishing himself in his chosen career – for some years he was even loath to let his work be seen in public – he remained alert to artistic trends at home and abroad.

In Paris, an intensely religious phase increasingly distracted him from his commercial work, which led to an ignominious dismissal from Goupil's in 1876. Thereafter, he made a series of attempts to follow in his father's footsteps, first through teaching, then through preparing the university entrance examination to study theology; however, he quickly abandoned a discipline that he found rigid and over-academic. In 1879-80 Van Gogh worked as a lay preacher in a Belgian mining community, but he threw himself into his duties so over-zealously that the authorities decided against renewing his employment.

This disappointment amid the increasingly sceptical environment of the period contributed to shaking Van Gogh's faith, and henceforth he modified his commitment to Christianity. The extent to which his ideas differed from the narrower and more orthodox theology of his father can be measured by his enthusiasm for the impassioned, moralising but anticlerical writing of Jules Michelet (1798-1874), the complexity of whose thought offered an alternative, in Van Gogh's view, to the Bible. Nevertheless, the deeply ingrained habits of Christianity had imbued him with a moral fortitude that helped him to persevere along the difficult vocational path of art, which, on the suggestion of Theo, he decided to take up in 1880.

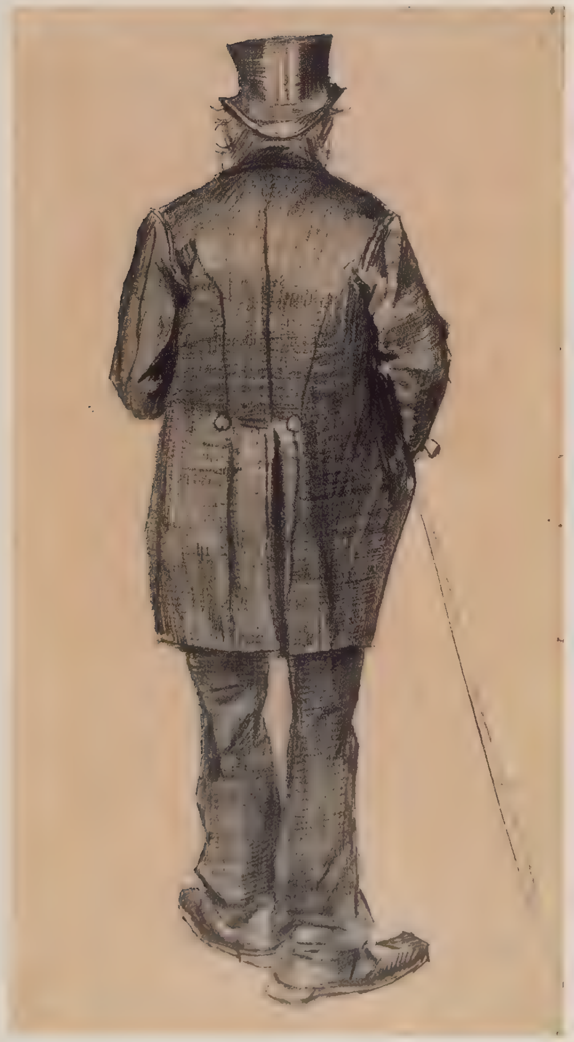


te schilderen en wat ruimer formaat –
En 't is daarvoor dat ik weer een nieuw en
hoop ik beter perspectiefraam laat maken
at in ongelyken duingrond b.v. licht vast
taat met twee stylen

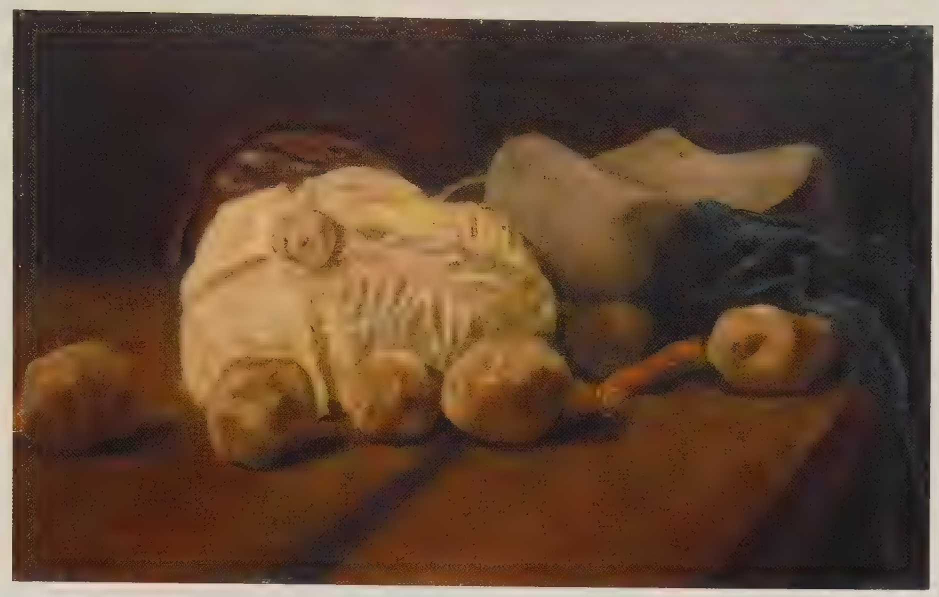
3
Sketch in a letter to Theo
of 5 August 1882 (254/222)
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

Van Gogh devoted his earliest efforts to drawing. His goal was to gain confidence and acquire knowledge in the handling of his materials and their effects, but to avoid facility or clever tricks of the trade. He worked systematically, concentrating for the first few years on the human figure, using a variety of graphic media. To start with he worked alone and relied on Theo, who was now based in Paris working for Goupil's in Vincent's stead, to supply him with specific prints to copy and French drawing manuals. Van Gogh's earliest drawings show him laboriously working through the recommended exercises, determined to master the mysteries of perspective. From early 1881 he worked with a small perspective frame, and the following year he constructed a large perspective frame, which he took out into the fields or onto the beach (ill. 3). This device, like a window frame criss-crossed with strings, helped him organise the chaotic information provided by nature into logical structures.

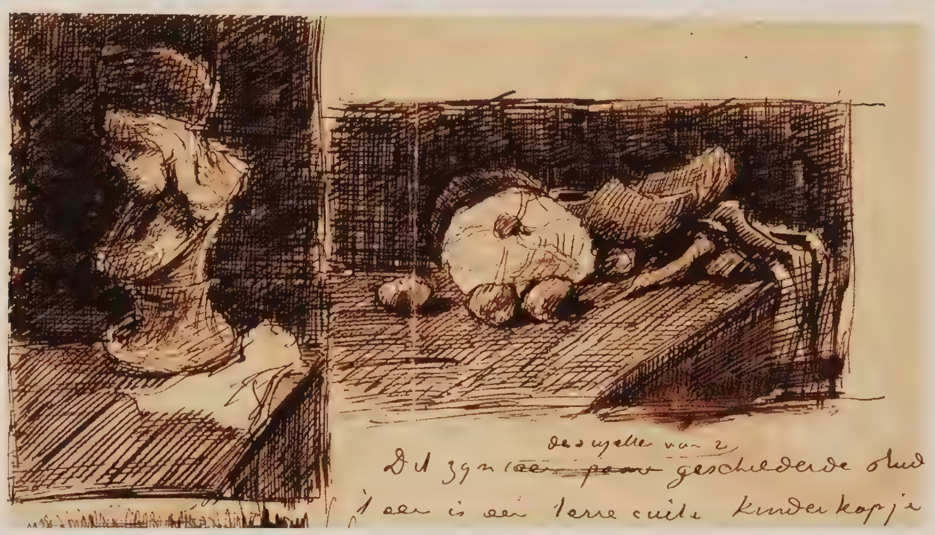
Van Gogh's realist approach to art was formed early on. He maintained that only when he had produced his first representation of his material surroundings, his chair, his table and window, with convincing perspective had he begun to believe in the possibility of becoming a painter. He identified firmly with his nation's strengths and limitations, and the whole legacy of Dutch art urged him in the direction of painting ordinary life in a realistic way: 'the Dutch have hardly any imagination or fantasy but immense taste and understanding of structure.' [651/B12] As for his resolutely down-to-earth choice of subjects, he clearly concurred with Michelet's view, expressed in *Le Peuple* (1846), that to depict successfully the 'family, the work, the most humble life of the people […] one needs eyes adjusted to […] subdued light, eyes to see into the small, dark, humble places, and a heart too to help one see into these recesses of the home, these Rembrandtesque shadows.' In Van Gogh's view, the artist whose life and work most fully embodied these aspirations was the 'peasant painter' Jean-François Millet (1814-1875). For all that Millet was French and a Catholic, he had imbued his rural subjects with an understanding of the Bible and a broad humanitarianism that had an immediate appeal for the Protestant Dutchman.


4
Old man in a tail coat
1882
pencil on paper
47.5 x 26 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

THE HAGUE 1882-1883 In late 1881, having spent a year with his parents in the village of Etten – a year which ended acrimoniously – Van Gogh decided to try his fortunes living independently as an artist in The Hague. It was a chance



5
Still life with cabbage and clogs
1881
oil on canvas
34 x 55 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

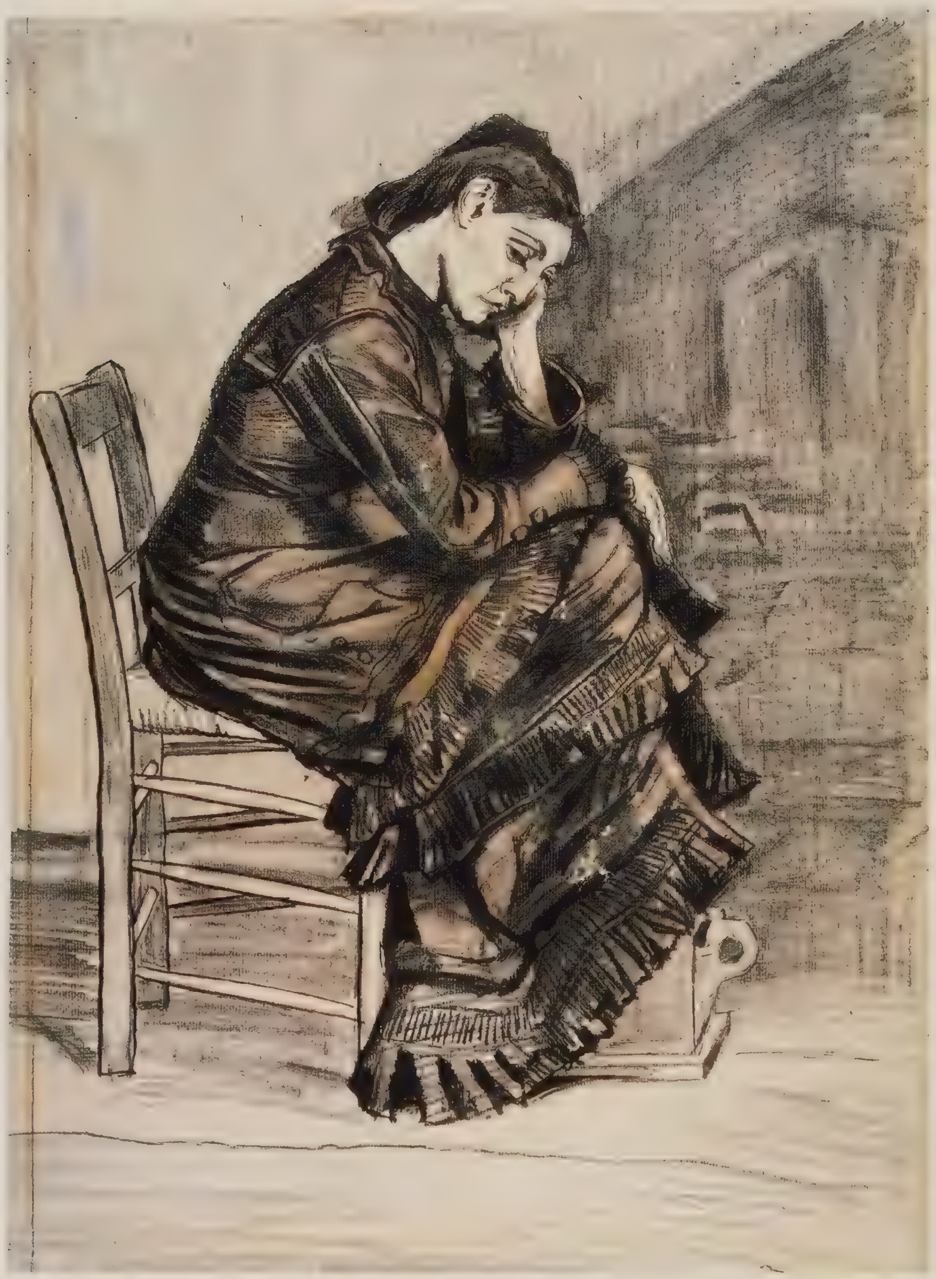


desgelijks van 2
Dit zijn ~~een paar~~ geschilderde olie
't een is een terre cuite kinderkopje

6
Sketch in a letter to Theo of c. 18 December 1881 (190/163)
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

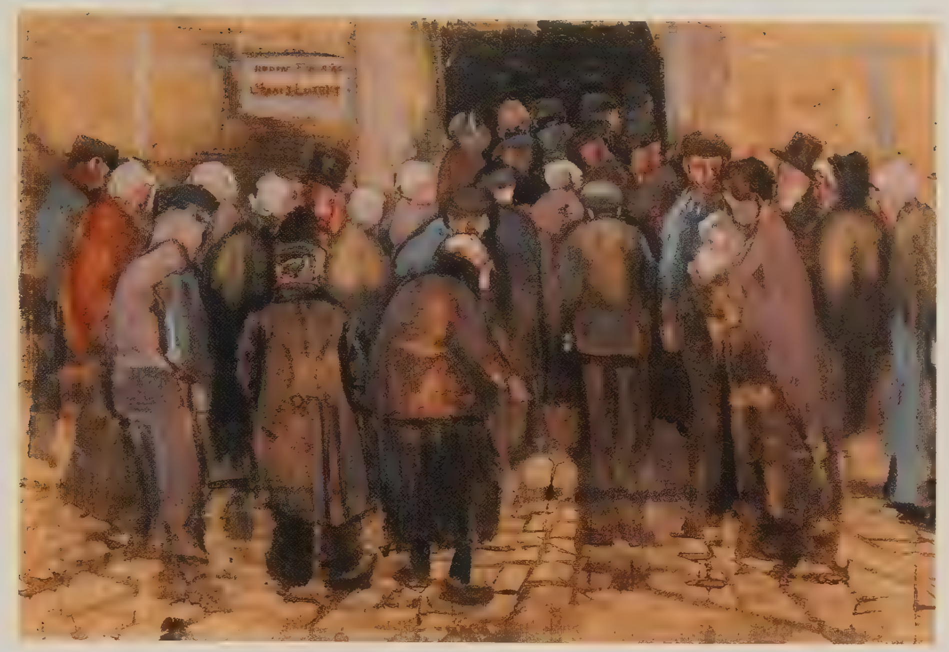
to meet other young Dutch painters, many of whom shared his commitment to *plein-air* realism. When he worked for Goupil's, he had become familiar with the artists of the Hague School, landscapists such as Jacob Maris (1837-1899) and Johan Hendrik Weissenbruch (1824-1903), who were successful exhibitors at the Paris Salon. Like Van Gogh, they were strongly influenced by Dutch seventeenth-century painting and by the work of the Barbizon School. Van Gogh sought guidance from his cousin by marriage Anton Mauve (1838-1888), an accomplished Hague School rural painter and watercolourist. Mauve gave him some useful tips on painting in oils and watercolours and persuaded him to tackle his first still lifes. Van Gogh was pleased with the results: 'I really believe there is some soundness and truth in them,' he told Theo, and made a pen-and-ink sketch of one of his earliest paintings (ill. 5) in a letter (ill. 6).

In the country he had tended to seek out models who had known the harsh realities of work – servants, agricultural workers and weavers – and,



7
Sorrowful woman
1881-83
pencil, pen and brush, sepia, washed
58 x 42 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

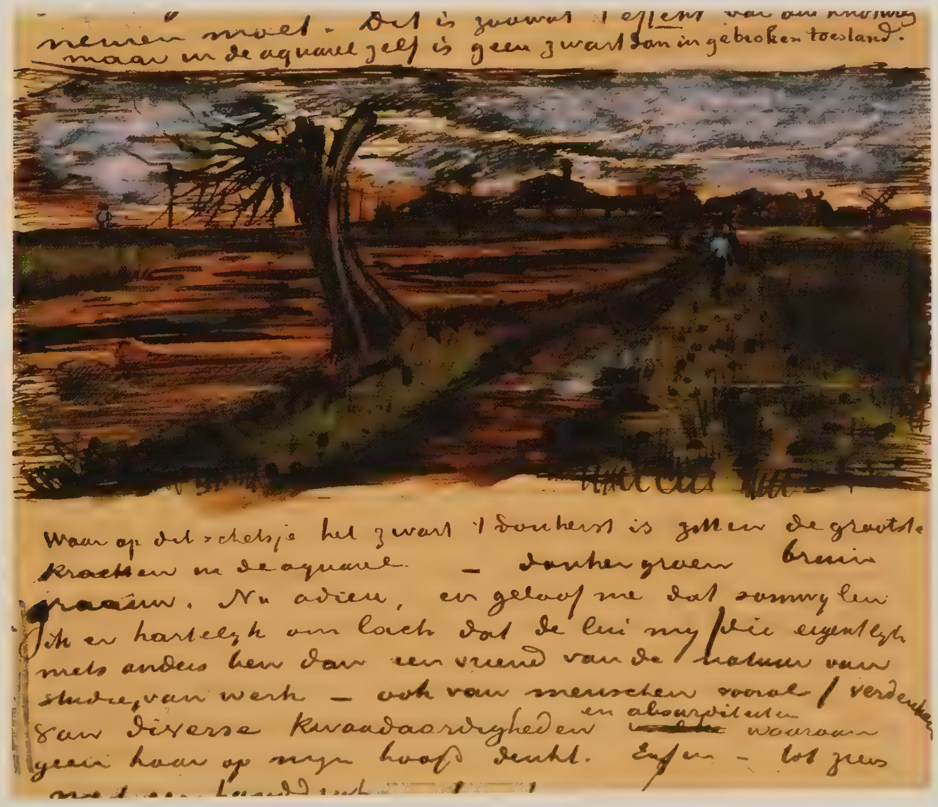
similarly, he sought his models in the city among prostitutes and paupers. The relative anonymity of urban life encouraged Van Gogh to turn his back on his bourgeois family by taking up with Sien Hoornik, a pregnant prostitute, who conformed in his mind to the archetypal 'fallen woman'. For a year he shared his living arrangements with Sien and her children, trying to raise her above the dire circumstances, in health and moral terms, to which she had been brought; she and they modelled for him in return (ill. 7). Sien's world gave Van Gogh an insight into the life of the poor; and for a time, since Van Gogh was an artist whose objective was to observe and paint that life, the arrangement served both parties well. But it was in reality an unromantic and recriminatory semblance of family life, which Van Gogh temporarily adopted and then, a year later, abandoned.



One of his first attempts at painting a group of figures in watercolour uses subdued colours (ill. 8) and rehearses the same socially aware urban motifs as his drawings. In The Hague Van Gogh also tackled some broad panoramic landscapes in watercolour, organising his designs with the aid of his perspective frame, although his hopes of making sales through such work came to nought. Nevertheless he was beginning to conceptualise scenes in ways that anticipate the compression and atmospheric power of later landscapes painted in Arles or Auvers (ill. 9). While Van Gogh was

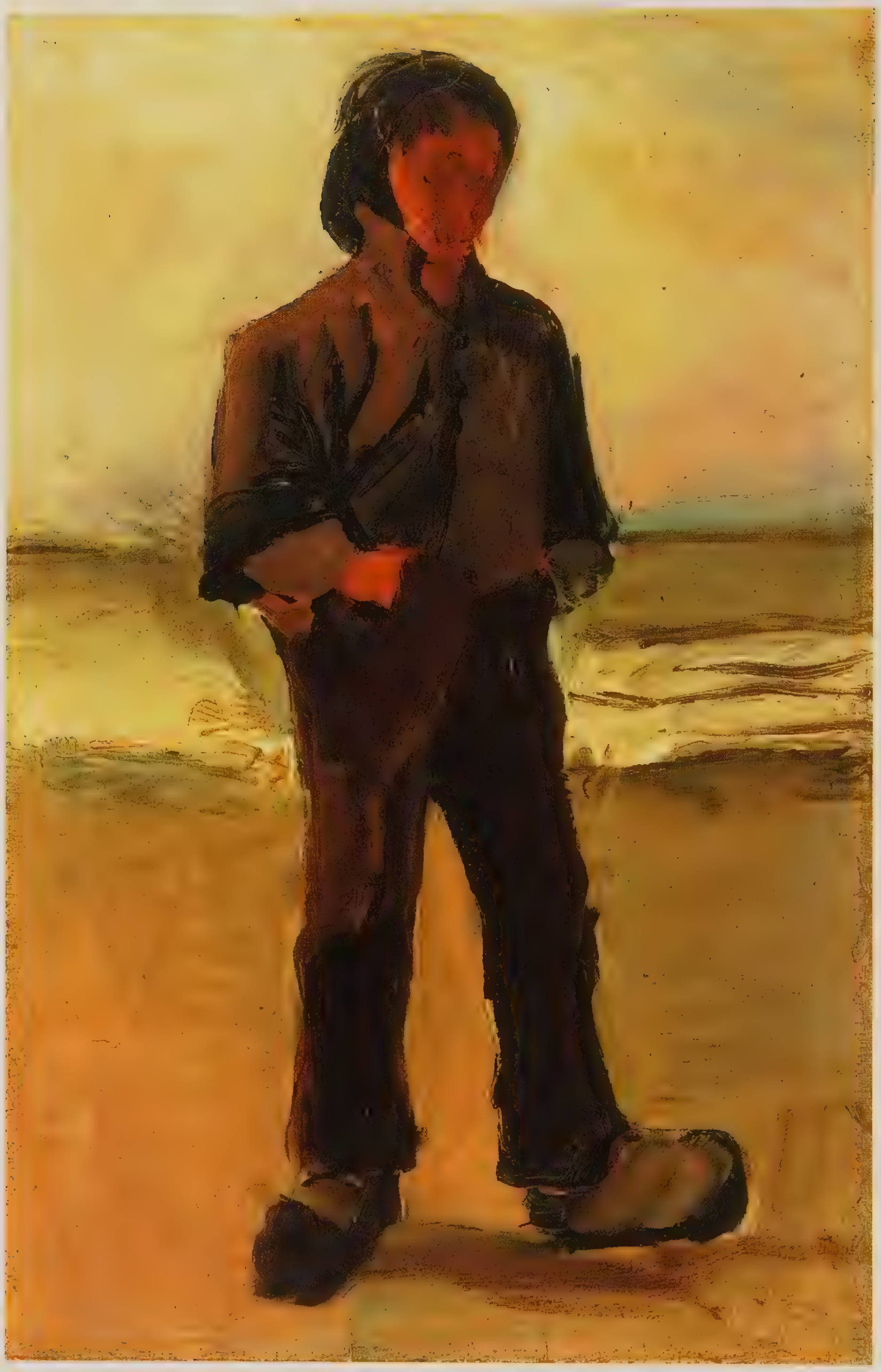
8
The poor and money
1882
watercolour
38 x 57 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

9
Sketch in a letter to Theo
of c. 1 August 1882 (253/221)
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



noemen moet. Dit is zoowat 't effect van een knotwilg
maar in de aquarel zelf is geen zwart dan in gebroken toestand.

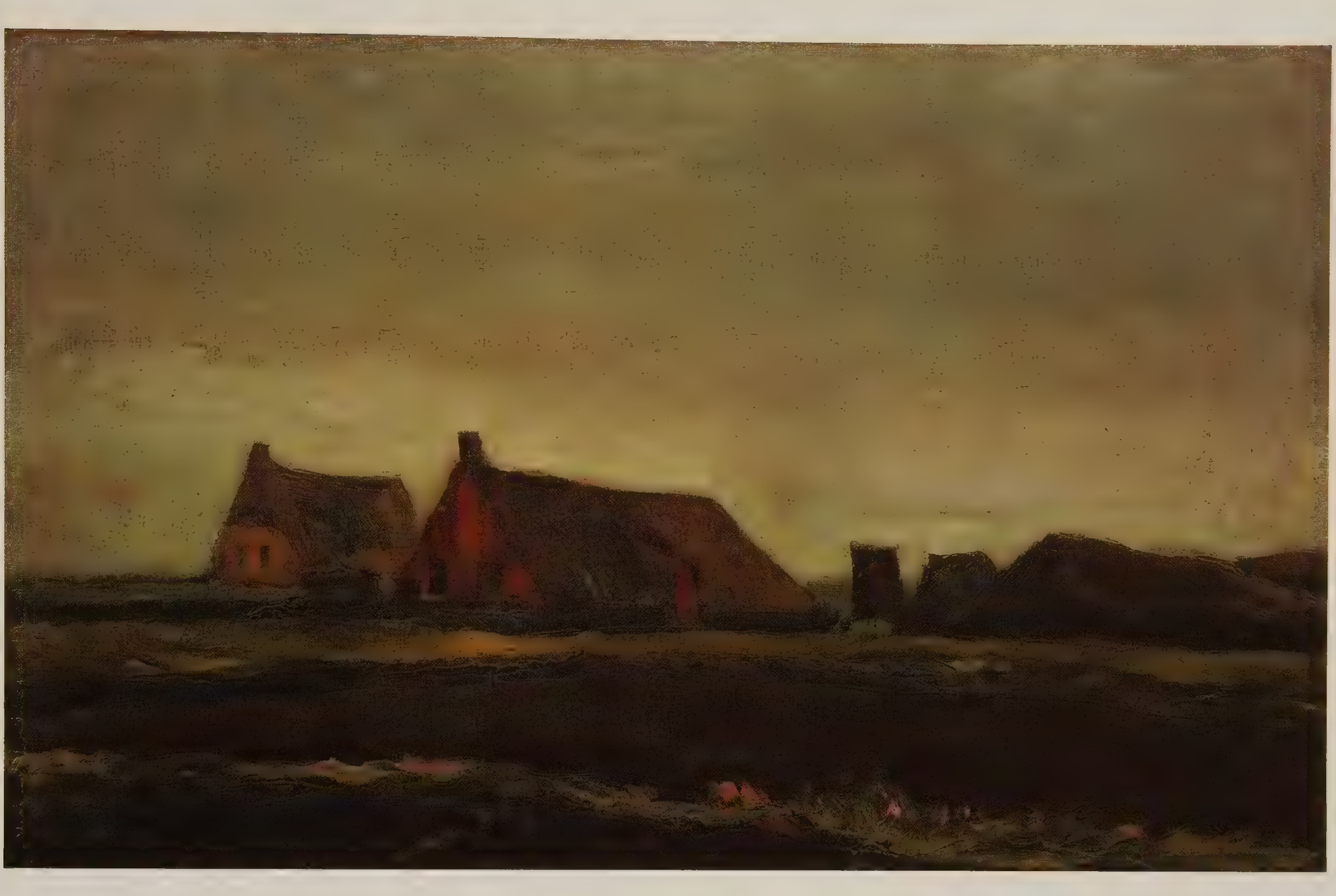
Waar op dit schetsje het zwart 't donkerst is zullen de grootste
krachten in de aquarel — donkergroen bruin
grijs. Nu adieu, en geloof me dat somtijds
ik er hartelijk om lach dat de lui mij (die eigenlijk
niets anders ben dan een vriend van de natuur van
studie, van werk — ook van menschen vooral) verdenken
van diverse kwaadaardigheden en absurditeiten ~~[illegible]~~ waaraan
geen haar op mijn hoofd denkt. Enfin — tot zoo



10
Fisherman on the beach
1883
oil on paper on panel
51 x 33 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

determined to acquire the complementary skills of drawing and painting, to master black and white *and* colour, he was in no hurry to take up painting: drawing had to come first. He was well aware of the mess other art students got themselves into trying to paint before they could draw securely.

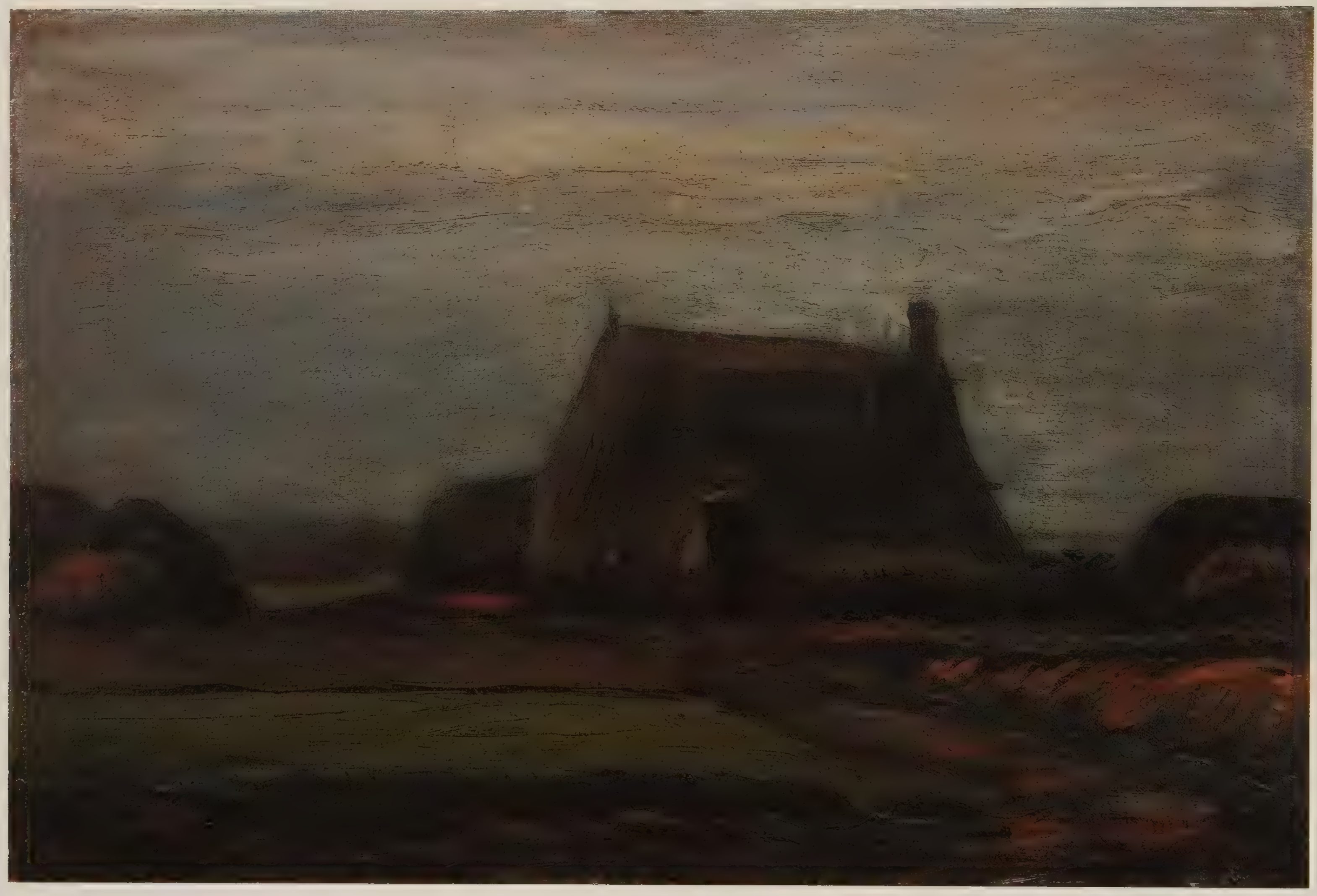
In fact, Van Gogh attained a remarkably advanced intellectual grasp of the problem of colour well before he started to use oil paint in earnest. By August 1882 he could discourse authoritatively to Theo on the subject:



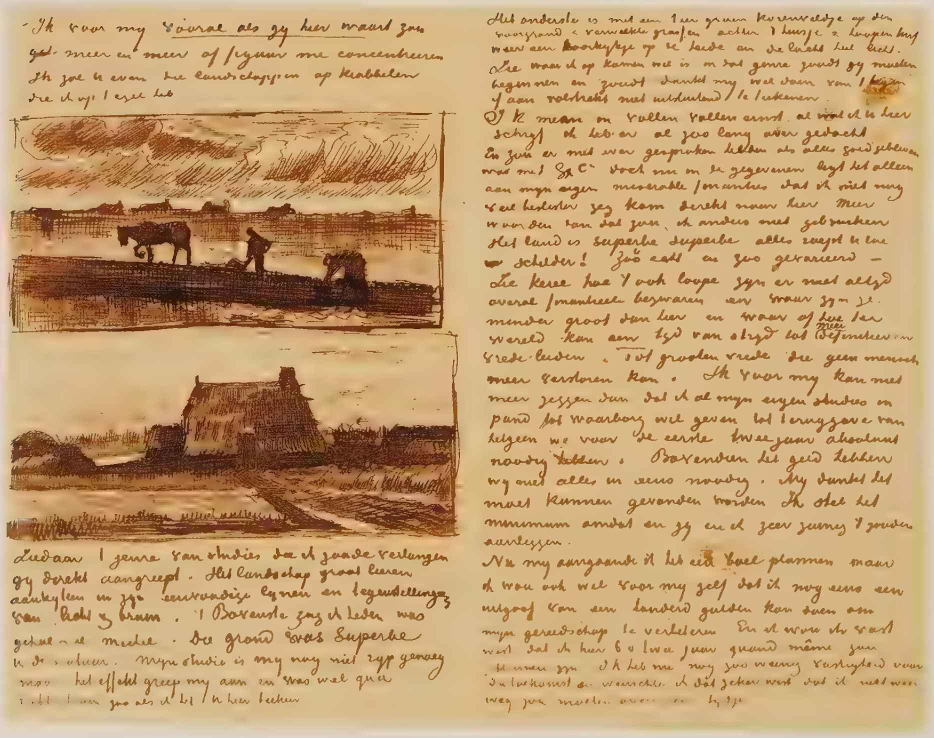
11
Cottages
1883
oil on canvas on pasteboard
36 x 55 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

'The colourist is the man who knows at once how to analyse a colour, when he sees it in nature, and can say, for instance: That green grey is yellow with black and blue, etc. In other words, the man who knows how to find nature's greys on his palette.' [253/221] This sensitivity to the nuances of grey was something he had learned from Mauve, and it would later be translated into an ability to differentiate the nuances of much brighter hues. A year after he and Mauve had observed fisherfolk at Scheveningen, a favourite haunt of the Hague School, Van Gogh was painting his own *Fisherman on the beach* (ill. 10). This broadly conceived study dispenses with preliminary drawing and fiddly detail to achieve a convincing sense of the figure being in the open air.

DRENTHE 1883 Van Gogh's relationship with Sien ended badly, and it was an expedient time to leave the city to work once again in a rural setting. From September to December 1883 he moved back to the countryside. He chose Drenthe, a flat, bleak region of north-eastern Holland inhabited by peat cutters; their cottages were the only feature on the heathland's low horizon (ill. 11). The backwardness and remoteness of the region suited painters in search of



12
Farm with stacks of peat
1883
oil on canvas
37 x 55 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

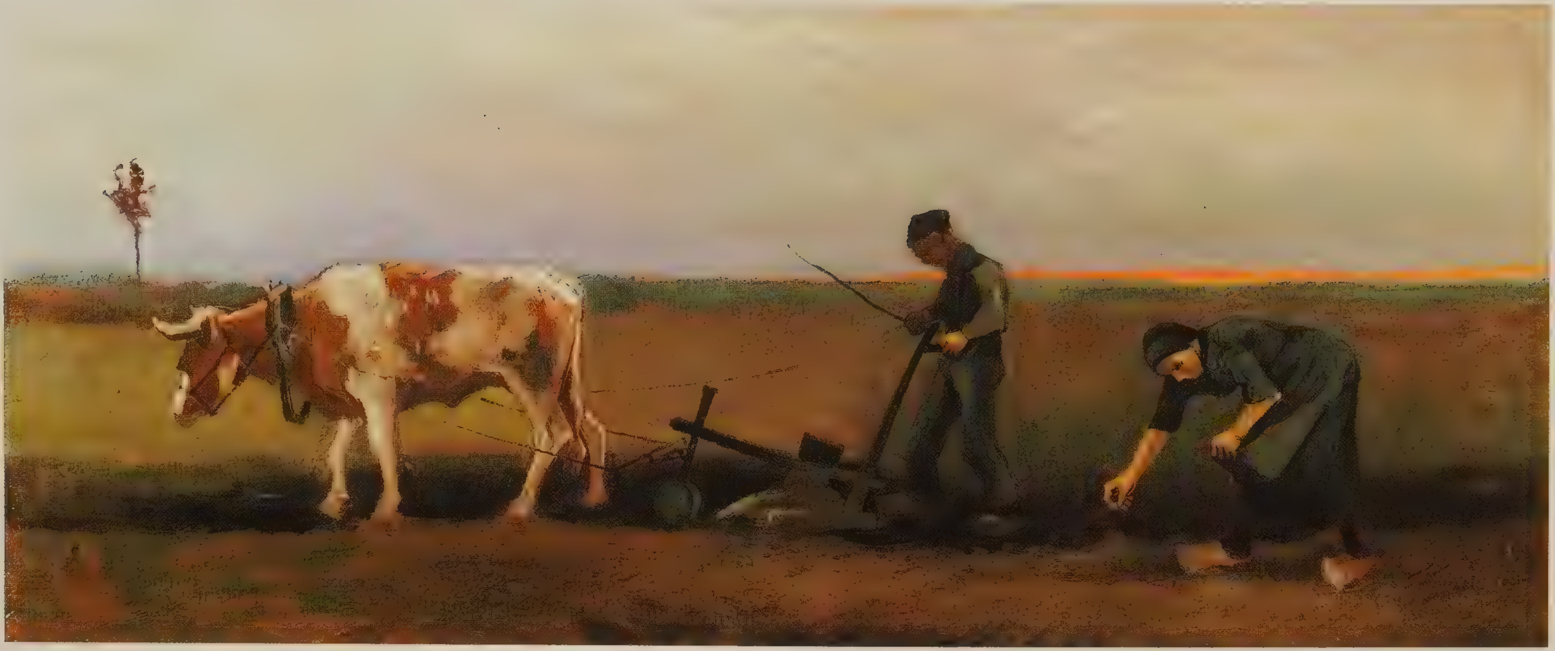


13
Sketch in a letter to Theo Van Gogh
between 29 October and
15 November 1883 (404/339)
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

- Ik voor my vooral als gy hier waart zou
gel. meer en meer op figuur me concentreeren
Ik zal u even de landschappen op krabbelen
die ik op 't ezel heb

Zoodaan 't genre van studies die ik gaarde verlangen
gy direkt aangreept. Het landschap graag leeren
aankyken in zyn eenvoudige lynen en tegenstellingen
van licht & bruin. 't Bovenste zag ik heden was
geheel en al Michel. De grond was Superbe
in de natuur. Myn studie is my nog niet ryp genoeg
maar het effekt greep my aan en was wel quer
[illegible] zoo als ik 't u hier teeken

Het onderste is met een teer groen korenveldje op den
voorgrond & verwelkte grasjes achter 't huisje 2 hoopen turf
waar een [illegible] op de heide en de lucht heel licht.
Zie waar ik op kamen wil is in dat genre zoudt gy moeten
beginnen en zoudt dunkt my wel doen van 't begin
af aan volstrekt niet uitsluitend te teekenen.
Ik meen in vollen vollen ernst. al vind ik 't te heer
schryf ik heb er al zoo lang over gedacht
En zou er niet over gesproken hebben als alles goed gebleven
was met G&C° doch nu in de gegevens ligt het alleen
aan myn eigen miserable finantien dat ik niet nog
veel beslister zeg kom direkt naar hier. Meer
woorden van dat zou ik anders niet gebruiken
Het land is superbe superbe alles zegt te me
schilder! Zóó echt en zoo gevarieerd —
Zie kerel hoe 't ook loope zyn er niet altyd
overal finantieele bezwaren en waar zyn ze
minder groot dan hier en waar op heel ter
wereld kan een tyd van altyd tot meer bezinken en
vrede leiden. Tot grooten vrede die geen mensch
meer verstoren kan. Ik voor my kan niet
meer zeggen dan dat ik al myn eigen studies in
pand tot waarborg wil geven tot teruggave van
hetgeen we voor de eerste twee jaar absoluut
noodig hebben. Bovendien het geld hebben
wy niet alles in eens noodig. My dunkt het
moet kunnen gevonden worden. Ik stel het
minimum omdat en gy en ik zeer zuinig 't zouden
aanleggen.
Nu my aangaande ik heb een boel plannen maar
ik wou ook wel voor my zelf dat ik nog eens een
uitgaaf van een honderd gulden kon doen om
myn gereedschap te verbeteren. En ik wou dit vast
weet dat ik hier 6 à twee jaar quand même zou
kunnen zyn. Ik heb nu nog zoo weinig vastigheid voor
de toekomst en wenschte ik dat zeker wist dat ik niet weer
weg zou moeten [illegible]

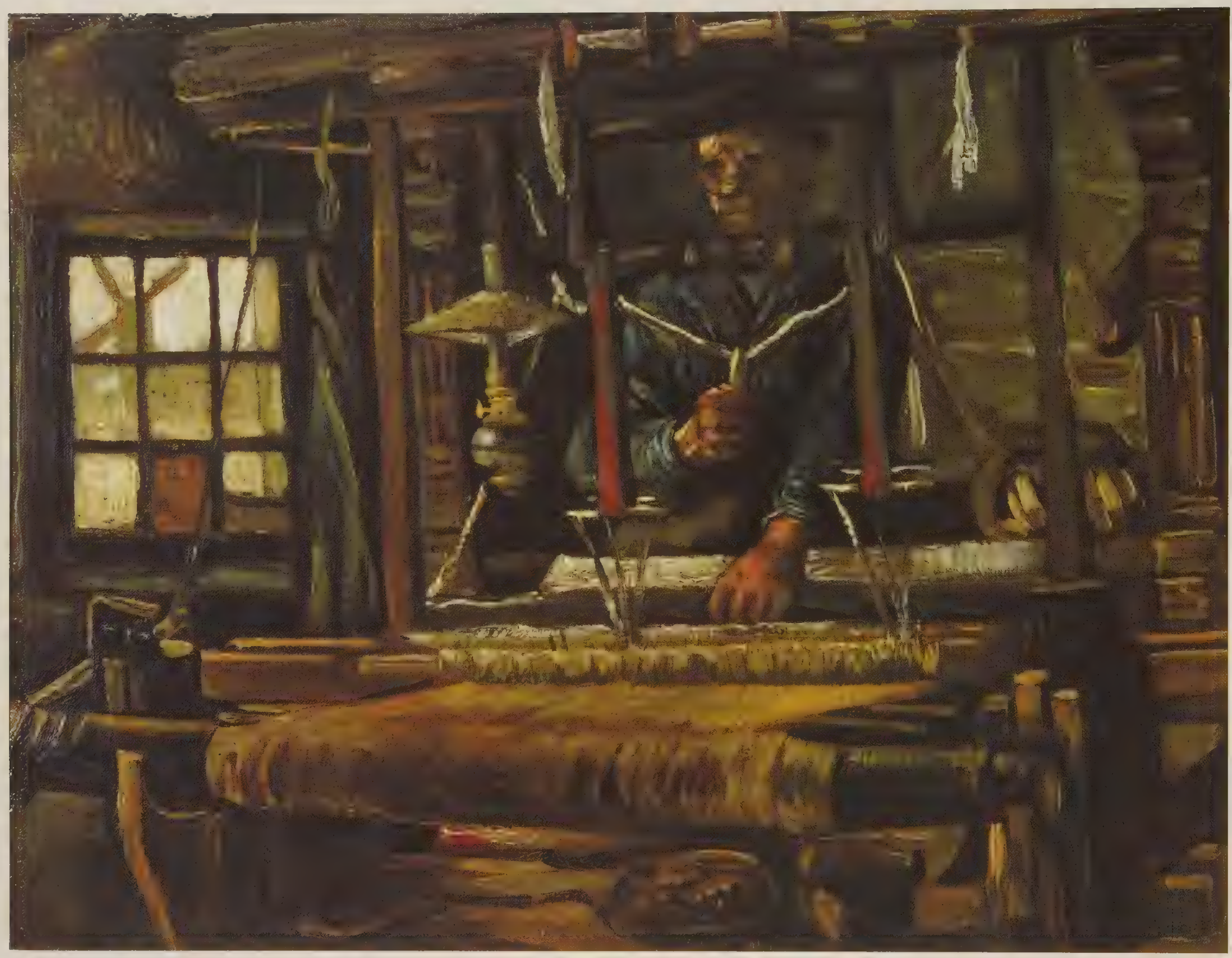


14
Ploughman with woman planting potatoes
1884
oil on canvas
70 x 170 cm
Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal

authentic rural scenes. Given his mood, Van Gogh felt in tune with the big brooding skies and tempestuous weather, and he painted some small but powerful, highly tactile and simplified landscape compositions. Unlike the tendency in his pen-and-ink drawing to analyse detail and the textures of landscape, he laid on the oil paint in thick, viscous bands differentiated by subtle tonal gradations (ill. 12, 13). He made studies of ploughing and the potato harvest, the backbreaking work of the peasant farmers whose lives were rooted in the soil. The low horizons helped him give a Millet-like monumentality to his working figures silhouetted against the sky. He would exploit this effect the following year when he created a series of frieze-like decorative paintings on the theme of the seasons for the dining room of Antoon Hermans, a wealthy patron from Eindhoven (ill. 14).

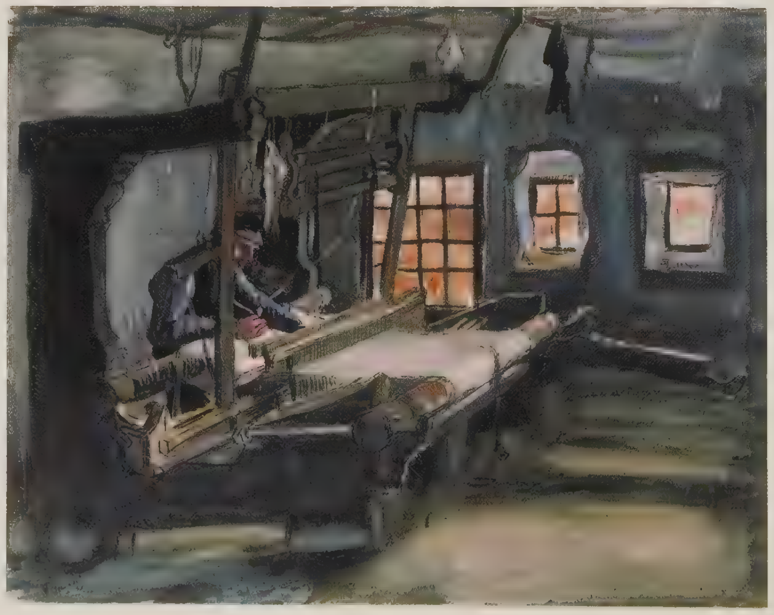
Although it helped confirm his own commitment to painting, Van Gogh's time in Drenthe brought home to him the loneliness and isolation of the life he had chosen. This feeling, together with news of difficulties Theo was experiencing with his Paris employers and a downturn in the international art market, led him to reiterate a decidedly impractical suggestion: that Theo should follow his own lead, abandon life as an art dealer and take up the challenge of painting: 'I think one feels more a man among other men as a painter, than in a life which is founded on speculation, and in which one has to heed conventions.' [399/335] If they joined forces their 'painting enterprise', as he now called it, would continue, but in a different way.

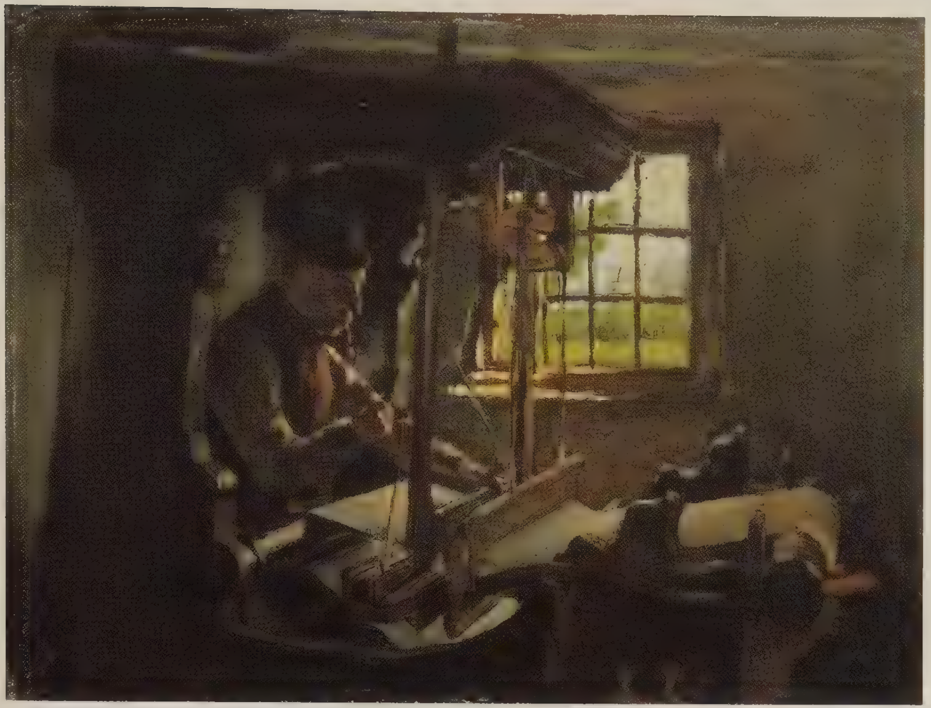
NUENEN 1883-1885 By December 1883 Van Gogh was driven to seek refuge once again with his parents, now based near Eindhoven in Nord Brabant, in the parish of Nuenen. He was to remain there for the next eighteen



15
A weaver and his loom
1884
oil on canvas on panel
48 x 61 cm
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen,
Rotterdam

16
Weaver
1884
watercolour, pen and ink
35.5 x 44.6 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

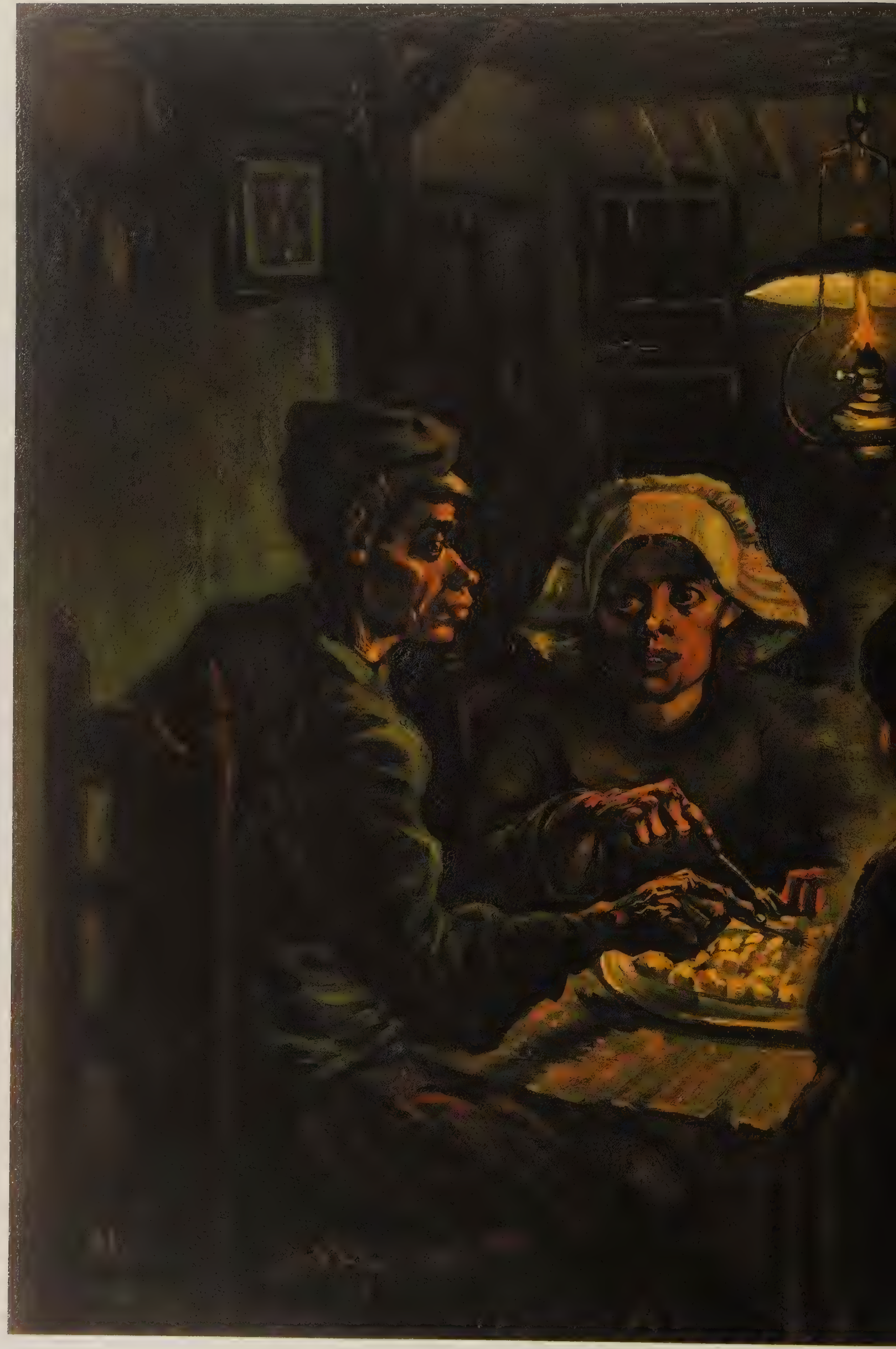


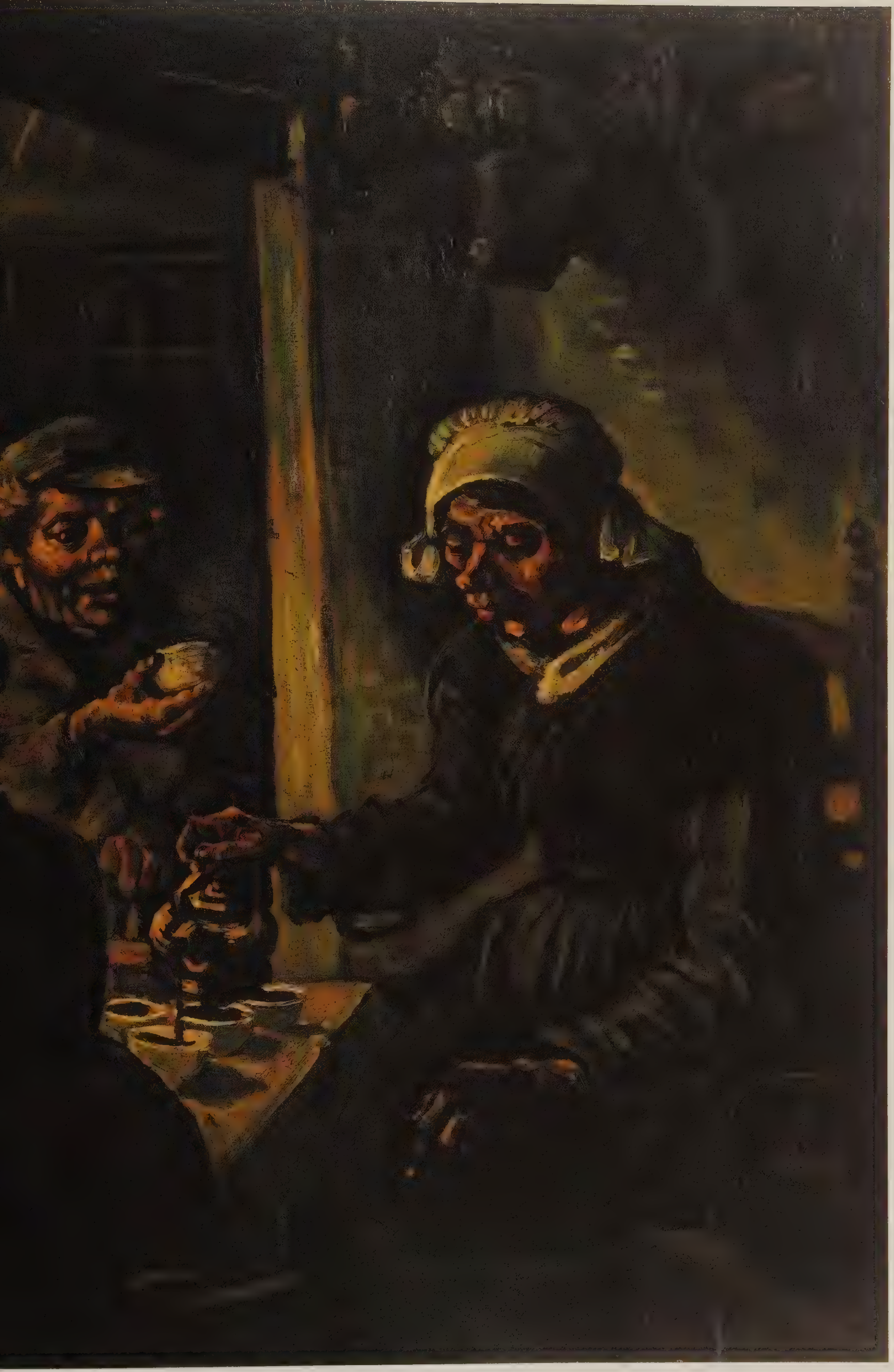


17
Anthon van Rappard,
The weaver
1884
oil on canvas
26 x 35 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

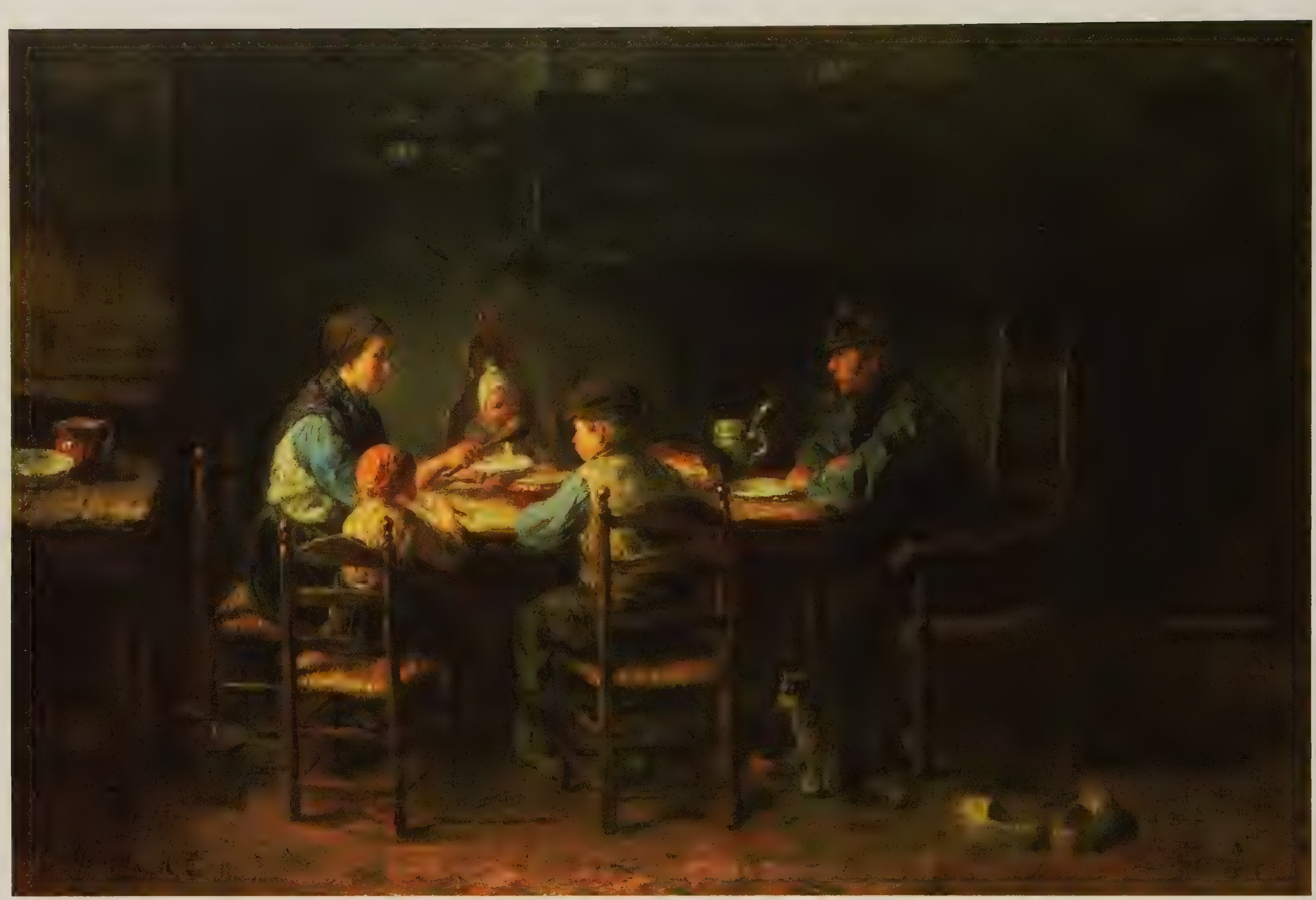
months. This represented an attempted reconciliation on his part and a resigned acceptance on their part of the seriousness of their eldest son's new career direction. Over the long term, the Van Gogh family was immensely supportive of Vincent, patient without being restrictive, but on occasion relations were certainly difficult. Disappointed in his father's unbending attitude – Theodorus had more or less expelled Vincent from the home in late 1881 – Van Gogh was now looking to the artists he admired, notably 'père' Millet, for paternal guidance rather than to his own father. Several paintings from the Nuenen period encapsulate those conflicted feelings.

One of Van Gogh's most positive relationships at this time was with fellow painter Anthon van Rappard (1858-1892), whom he had first met in Brussels in 1880. The two shared a common commitment to peasant painting and to a realist and rural vision, which they kept stoked by accumulating images from recent as well as past art. Van Gogh tirelessly looked out black-and-white prints both on his own account and on behalf of his wealthy friend – their preference being for English illustrations on social themes. At times, he sounds like a dealer writing to his client. The two artists spent two short periods working side by side in Nuenen, intensely fruitful periods for Van Gogh. He undoubtedly respected Van Rappard and followed his lead in embarking upon a systematic and morally charged study of the rural weavers, whose solitary way of life was threatened by industrialisation (ill. 15). The passion he brought to this project reflects his reading of George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) as well as of Michelet, who in *Le Peuple* had written emotively of the dire consequences for the rural worker of





18
The potato eaters
1885
oil on canvas
82 x 114 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

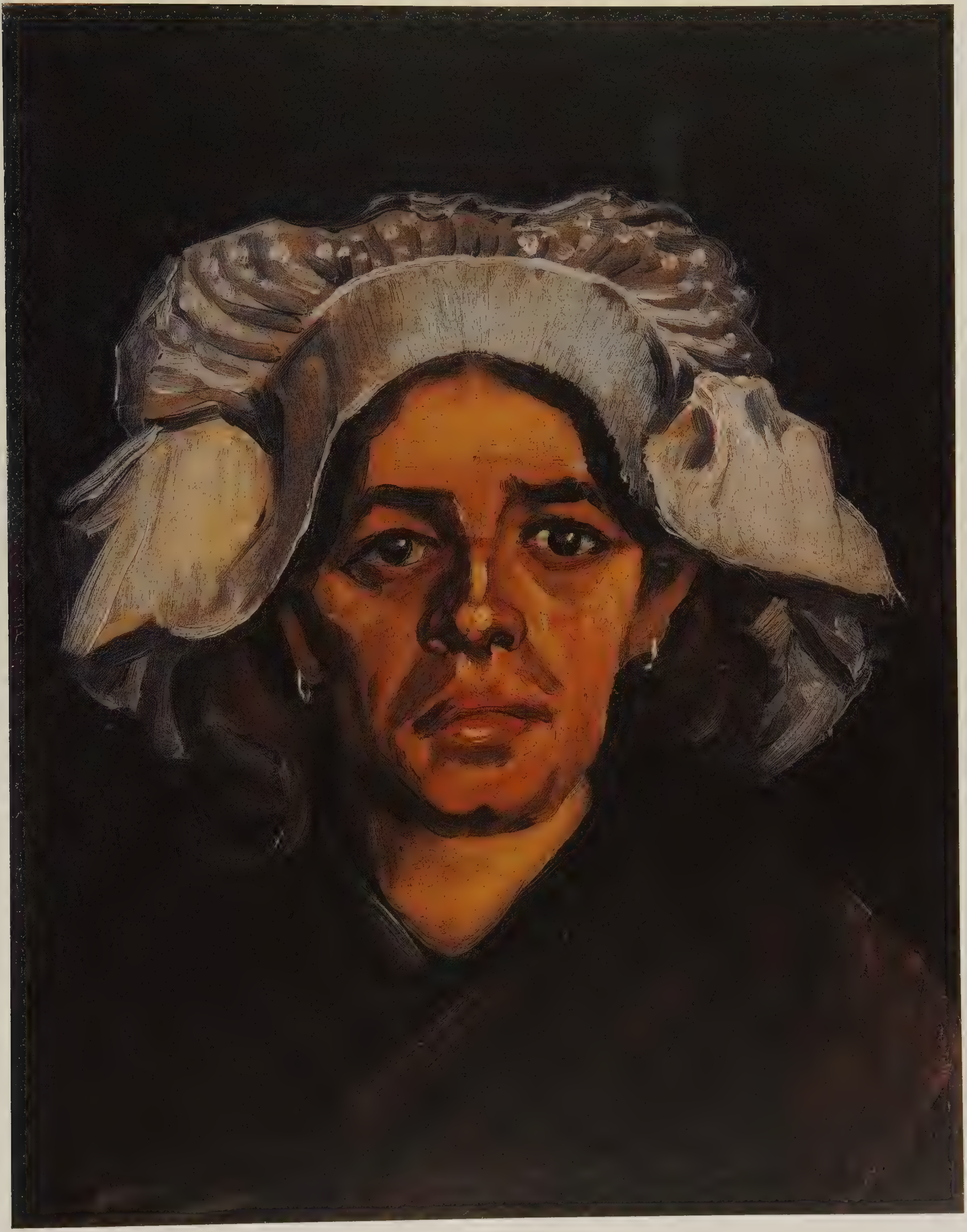


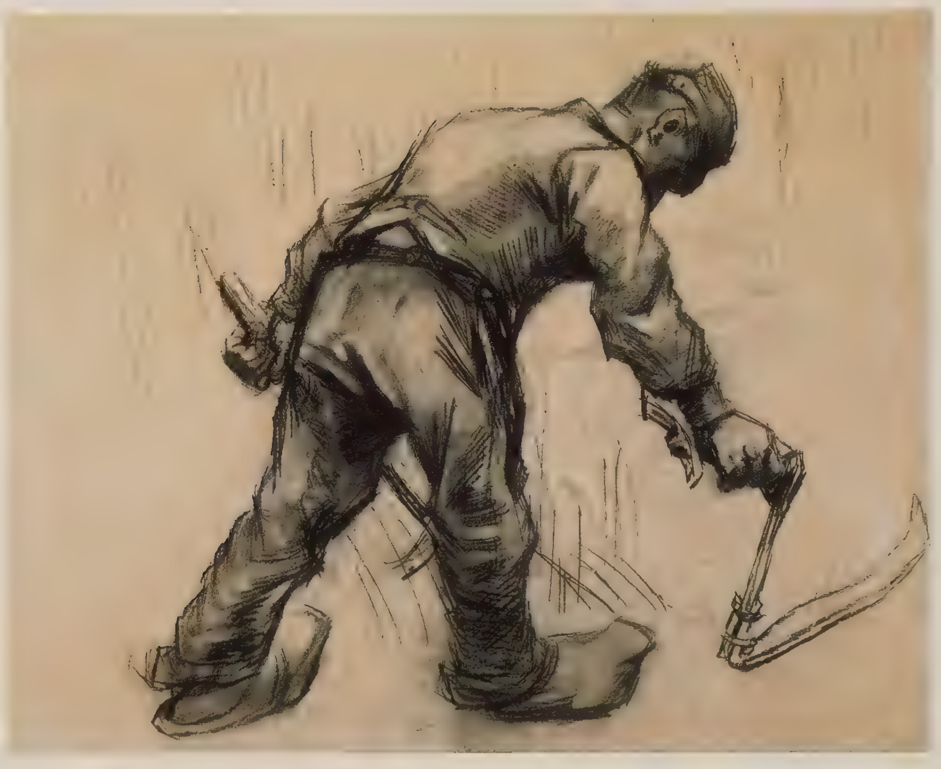
19
Jozef Israëls
Peasant family at table
1882
oil on canvas
71 x 105 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

20
Head of a woman
1885
oil on canvas
45 x 36 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

switching from a hand loom, whose rhythms he could control, to the factory-based power looms, whose relentless propulsion would control him. Both artists adopted a limited palette of earthy browns, greys and blacks. They were preoccupied by trying to capture light effects, for instance observing their spinners and weavers *à contre jour* against a bright-toned window (ill. 16, 17). Although Van Gogh did not aspire to paint with Van Rappard's usual degree of finish, his friend's work was an inspiring example.

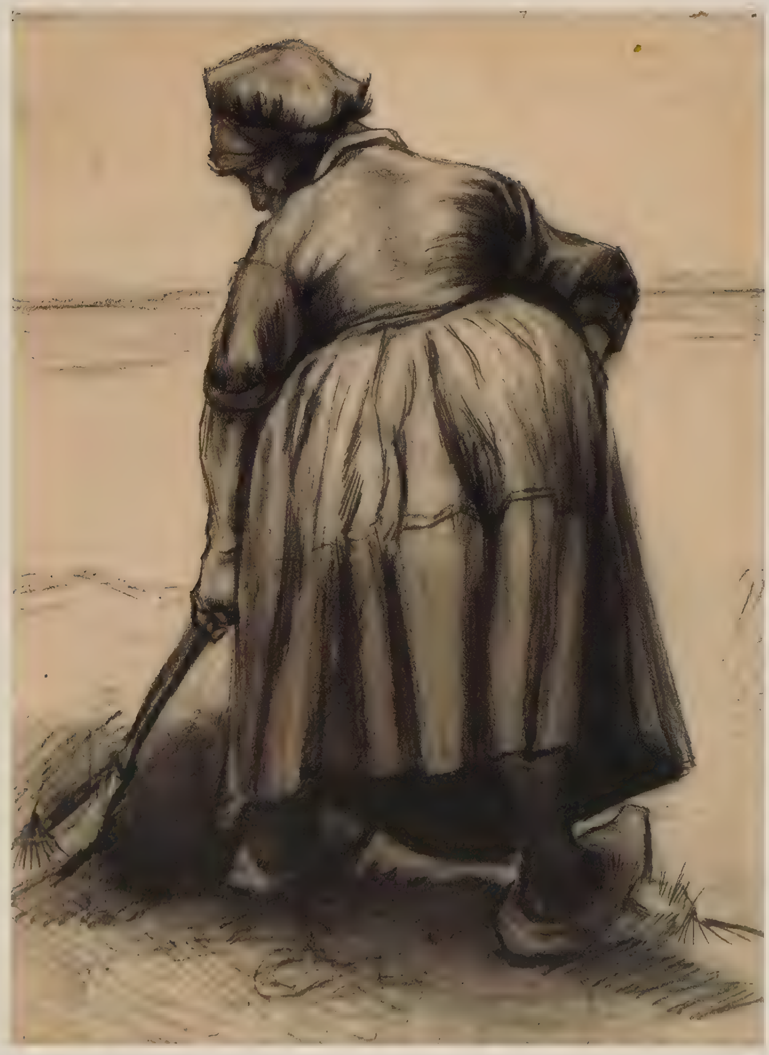
The studies of weavers, women digging and peasant heads that date from this period relate to specific campaigns of concentrated work, as Van Gogh struggled to explore rural life exhaustively. His first major painting project, *The potato eaters* (ill. 18), developed logically from the goals he had set himself. His intention was to produce a narrative genre painting that brought together the results of his long apprenticeship working from peasant life. But the idea involved difficulties of many kinds. At a technical level, he had no experience of coordinating several figures and having them interrelate to one another; all his efforts hitherto had been expended on single figures. In *The potato eaters* he wanted these individuals to bespeak the effort





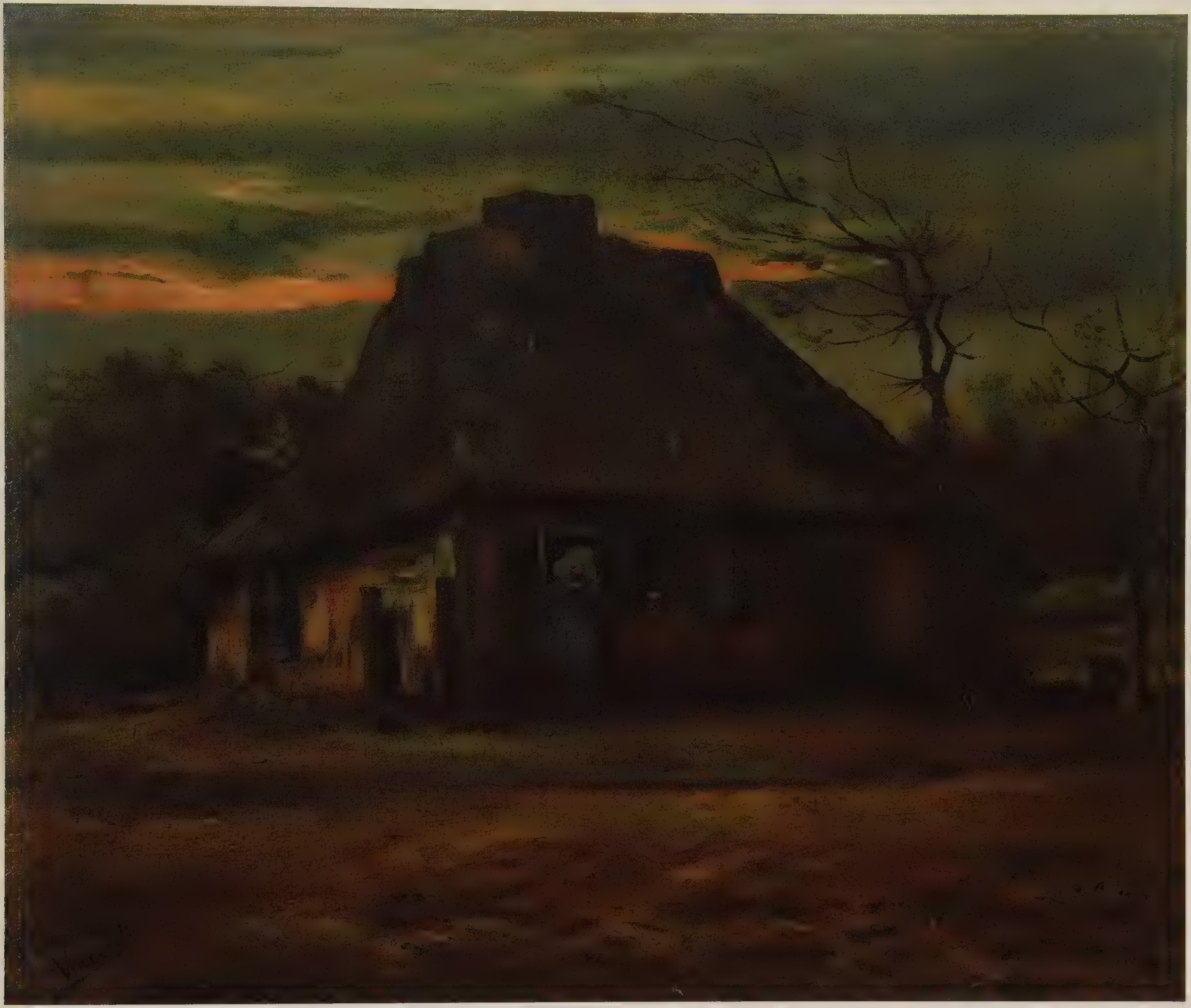
21
Reaper
1885
black chalk, stumped
41 x 51 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

22
Peasant woman digging
1885
black chalk
55.5 x 40.5 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



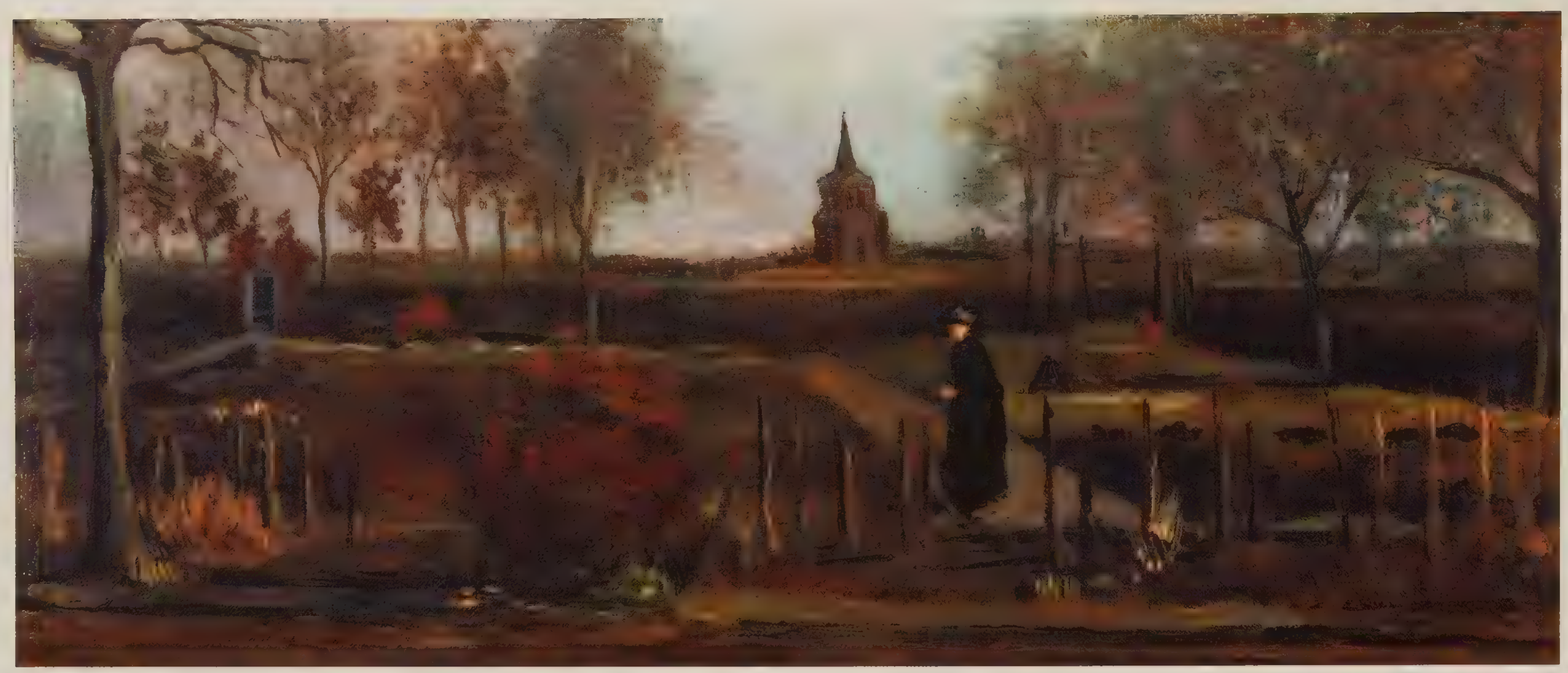
that had gone into their meagre meal: the sowing and pulling, scrubbing and cooking of the potatoes. Like an artist preparing a major composition for exhibition at the annual Paris Salon, he hired models to sit for him, at some cost, selecting the local De Groot family on the basis of their grossly coarse features. But the drawings he made of them have a forced, stiff look, which was not conducive to arranging a plausible scene. To counteract this, he produced another group of studies concentrating on certain gestures and movements: gnarled hands wielding forks or pouring from a jug. He also made repeated studies in oil of the different female heads (ill. 20).

Then there were the difficulties of colour, of conveying through its earthiness the cramped space of the dark cottage and the figures' relationship to the soil. What is striking about both this and his earlier weaver painting (ill. 15) is the way in which Van Gogh articulates the space. Nothing is left vague, there is no ambient atmosphere



23
The cottage
1885
oil on canvas
64 x 78 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

as in comparable rural genre scenes such as the somewhat sentimental *Peasant family at table* by Jozef Israëls (1824-1911), where the figures are absorbed much more harmoniously into their environment (ill. 19). This unwillingness of Van Gogh to subordinate secondary parts of the picture to what would normally be considered the main focus became a consistent feature of his working method, ultimately one that made his work innovative, challenging and modern. But by refusing to comply with nineteenth-century standards of decorum, by overworking the importance of the gestures and of the setting to satisfy his own requirements, Van Gogh paradoxically rendered his rural genre composition illegible. Despite all his efforts to explain what he was after, his first viewers – Parisian colleagues of Theo,

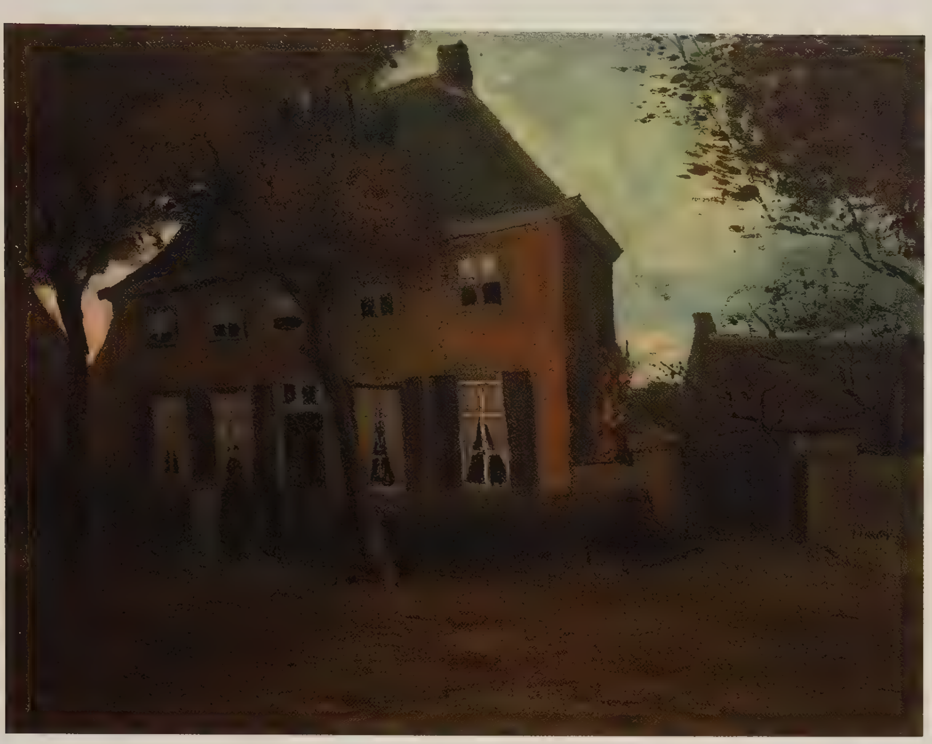


24
The vicarage garden at Nuenen
1884
oil on paper on panel
25 x 57 cm
Groninger Museum

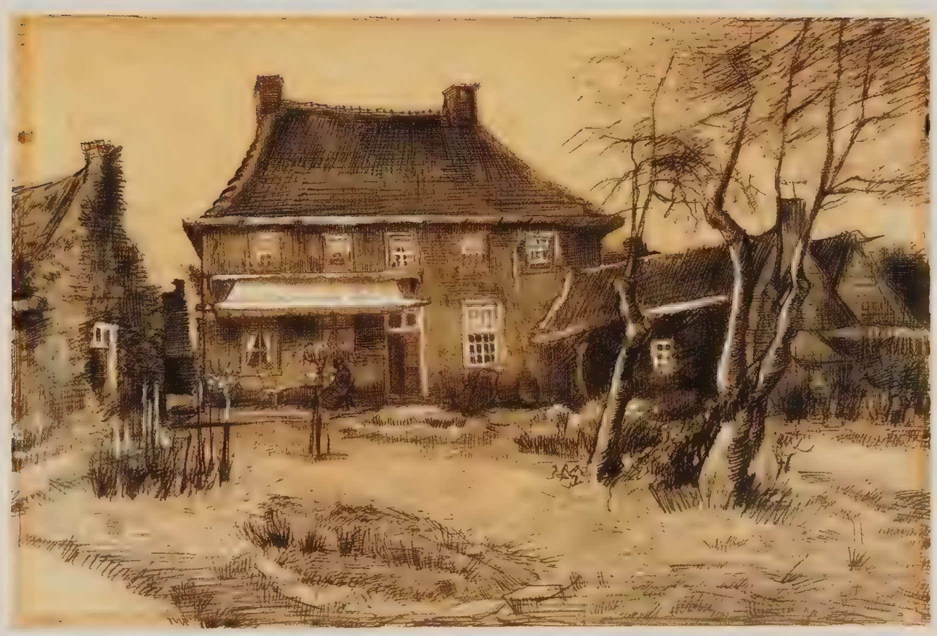
to whom he sent the canvas in May – merely found fault with the figures' anatomy, refused to see anything but ugliness, and failed to apprehend the purpose of that ugliness.

Over the long term *The potato eaters* marked a turning-point in Van Gogh's career. He would never again expend so much trouble on a single work. The difficulties he had encountered in making the picture arguably taught him a crucial lesson, namely that sometimes, to convey one's meaning in art, less is more. Certainly he seems henceforth to have abandoned the idea of tackling further elaborate multi-figure compositions and to have set his sights on more manageable goals. Although during the summer of 1885 Van Gogh responded to criticism of *The potato eaters* to the extent of renewing his efforts at drawing working peasant figures, in terms of subject matter he became more obstinately entrenched in his adopted role as a 'peasant painter' (ill. 21, 22). He now maintained he was only at home among the labouring poor and felt quite incapable of painting portraits of more refined sitters, his own sisters for example.

Three starkly simple paintings stand out from Van Gogh's production in 1885; each has a building as its central subject. Two are ambitious in scale, and all emphasise the consistency and connectedness of his artistic approach. The first (ill. 23) is an exterior view of a traditional thatched cottage, one of the last to be found around Nuenen. Van Gogh approached it from an oblique angle – a test of his mastery of perspective – and in fading light, the heavy overhang of the thatch helping to give a firm sense of its volume. In the dark doorway stands its inhabitant, a peasant woman in white coif seen from behind, perhaps one of the models he had studied over the winter. The scale of this figure serves as a marker against which to judge the



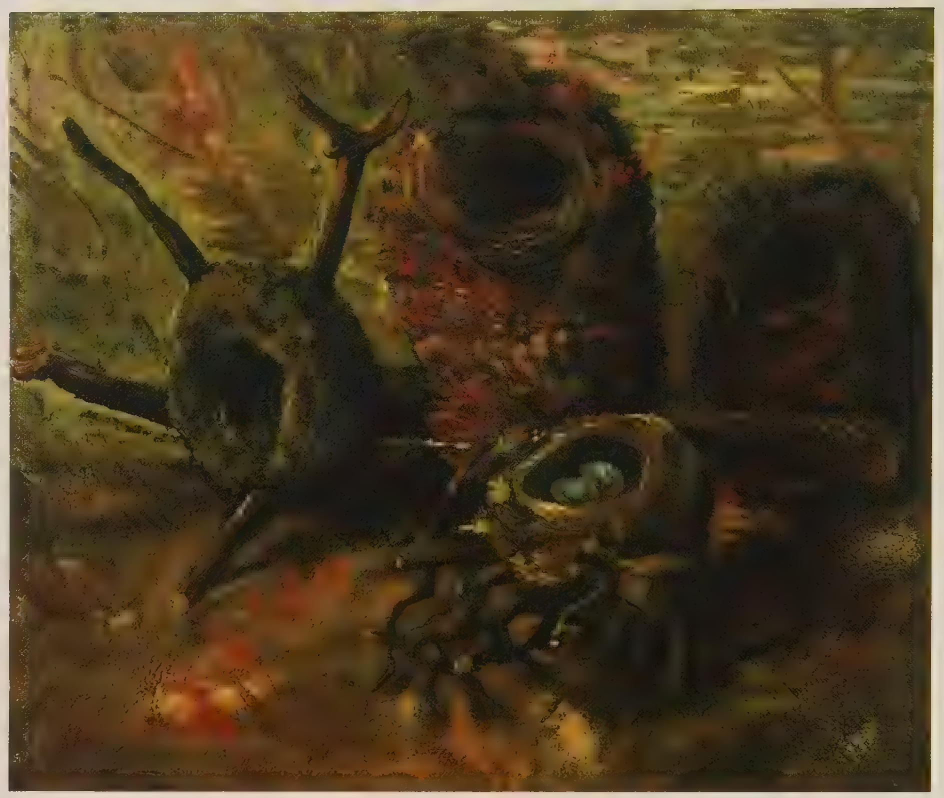
25
The vicarage at Nuenen
1885
oil on canvas
33 x 43 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



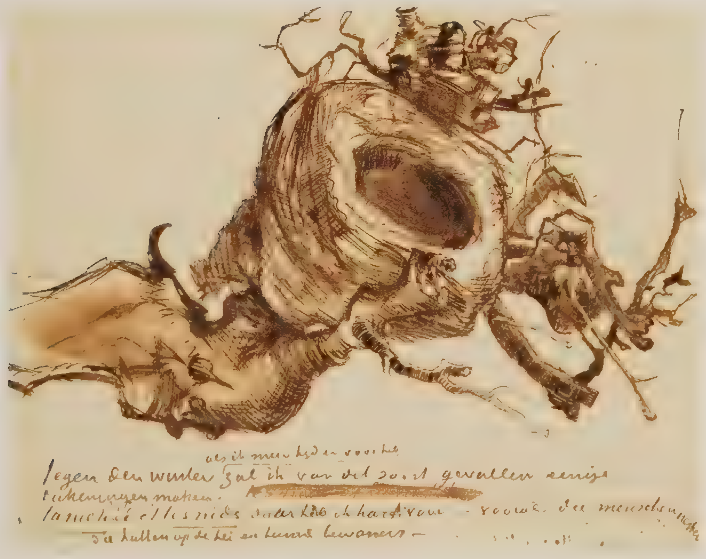
26
The vicarage at Nuenen
1884
graphite and stump,
pen and brown ink
heightened with white
24.3 x 36.6 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario,
Toronto

low height of the cottage walls and doors. The sky and windswept trees offer little protection to this 'little human nest', as Van Gogh described it.

Soon afterwards he painted what was to be his last view of a building that he had painted repeatedly since moving to Nuenen, the old church tower, destined for demolition, which stood alone and gaunt in the fields behind the village (ill. 31). His viewing angle was the same as for the cottage, and although the tonality is brighter, the rain-filled clouds and circling crows give the subject an air of desolation. Around the church tower, which has already lost its steeple, lies the churchyard with its scattering of simple crosses. If their presence prompted Van Gogh to reflect upon his



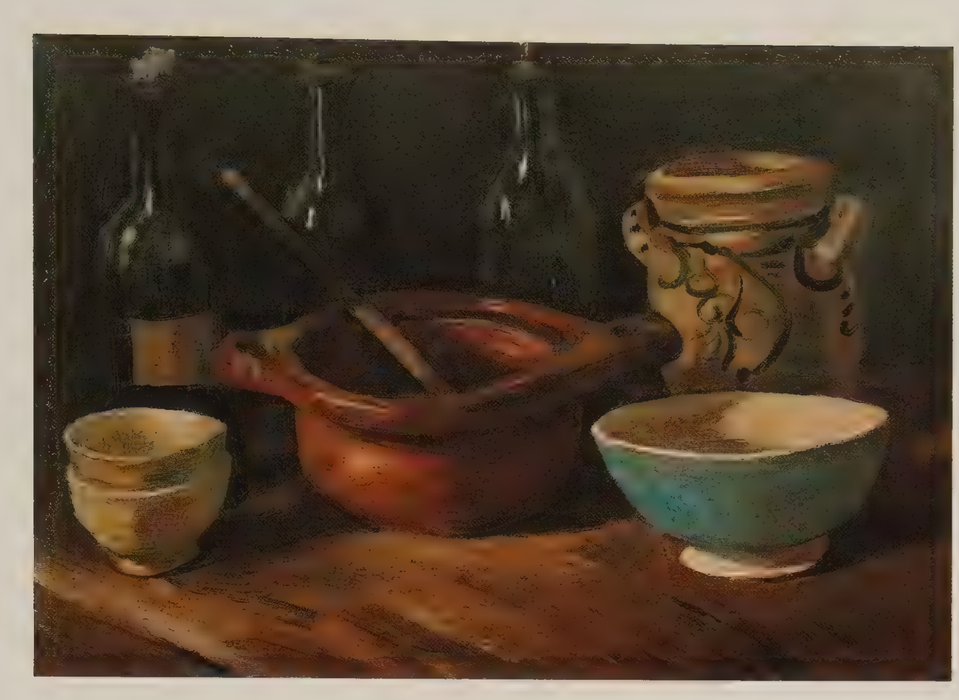
27
Still life with birds' nests
1885/1887
oil on canvas
38 x 46 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam


als ik meer heb en voor het
Tegen den winter zal ik van dit soort gevallen eenige
teekeningen maken.
[illegible] vooral die menschennesten
Die hutten op de hei en hunne bewoners –

28
Sketch in a letter to Theo of
end September 1885 (536/425)
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

father's recent death and the unchanging simplicity of being laid to earth, the imminent fate of the church itself was a still more poignant contemporary symbol: 'this ruin tells me how a faith and a religion mouldered away.' [510/411] He painted a third building on a rather smaller scale, his own former home, the four-square, prosperous-looking Nuenen vicarage (ill. 25). There for a time he had had his first proper studio in a converted outhouse, which projected into the garden (ill. 26). Two bourgeois women wearing black stand at the gate, possibly his mother and sister. By the date he painted the house he had already been asked to leave it by his sister Anna (1855-1930), and the remaining family would soon disperse.

In the autumn he was busy with a new series of still lifes, some featuring local earthenware (ill. 29), others potatoes (ill. 30), a theme so dusty and monochrome it was scarcely likely to appeal to the public. 'I tried to get *corps*, I mean, to express the material in such a way that they become heavy, solid lumps,' he explained to Theo [536/425]. An equally idiosyncratic choice of still-life theme was birds' nests, of which Van Gogh had assembled quite a collection. The shape and character of each nest was specific to the species that built it (ill. 27, 28). His intense admiration of these nests was undoubt-

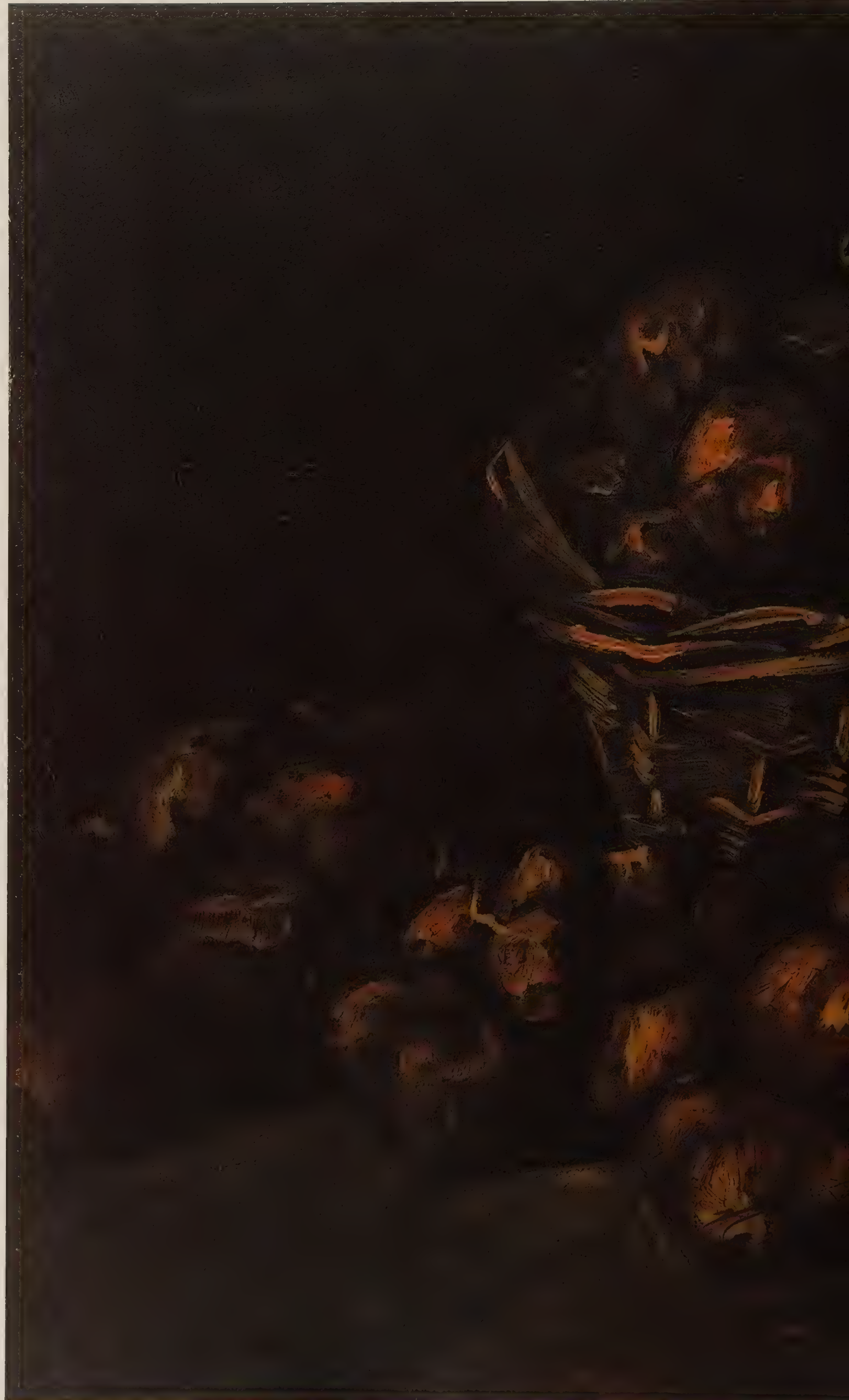


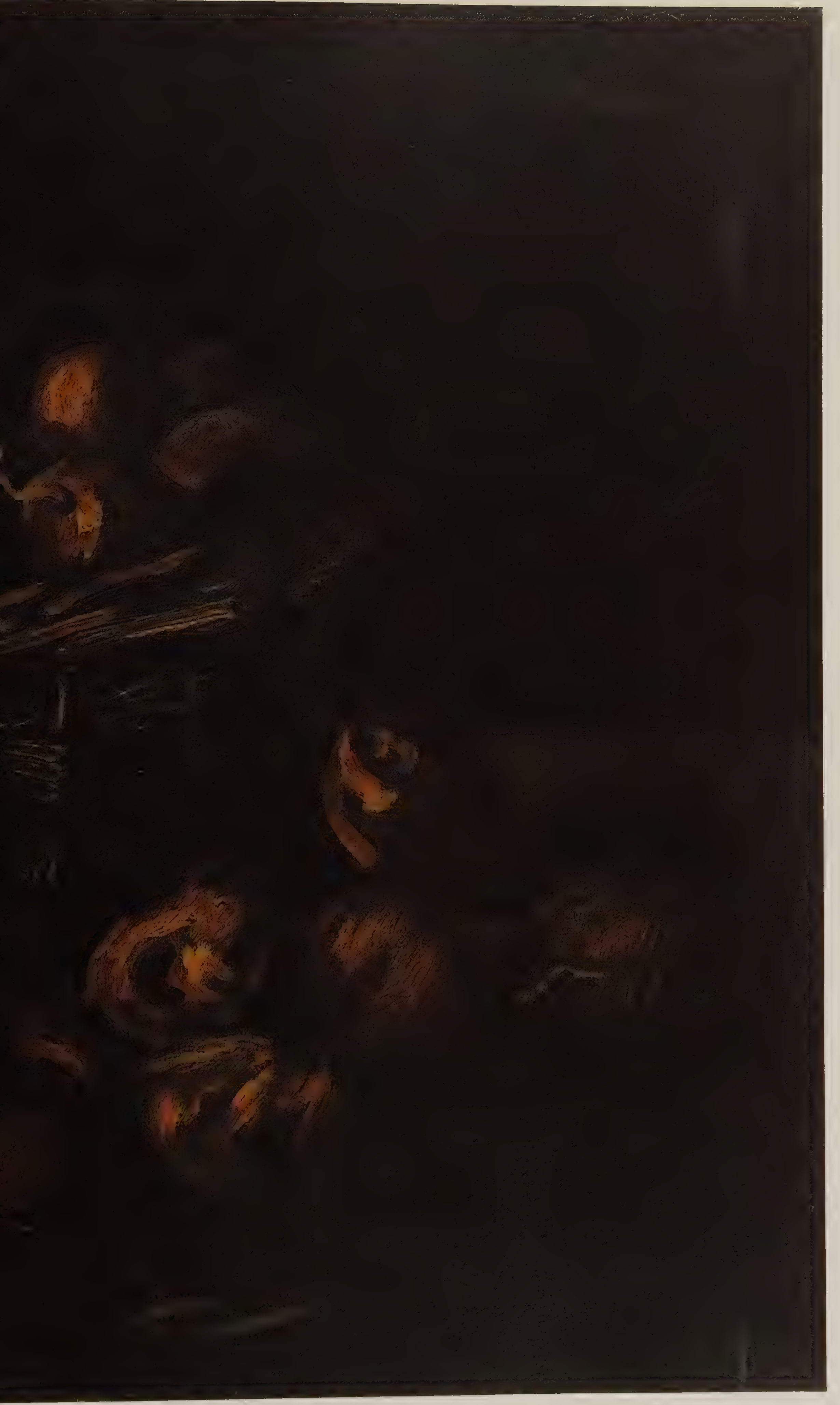
29
Still life with earthenware and bottles
1885
oil on canvas
39 x 56 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

edly connected to his enthusiastic reading of Michelet's *L'Oiseau* (1856), not just for its information on avian life but for the insights it gave him into human nature. Looking back on his own socially awkward transition from evangelist to artist, he drew a parallel with the bird at the time of moulting. In his poetry album he also copied out a long romantic passage about the nightingale, which identified its sublimation of suffering through song with the artistic soul.

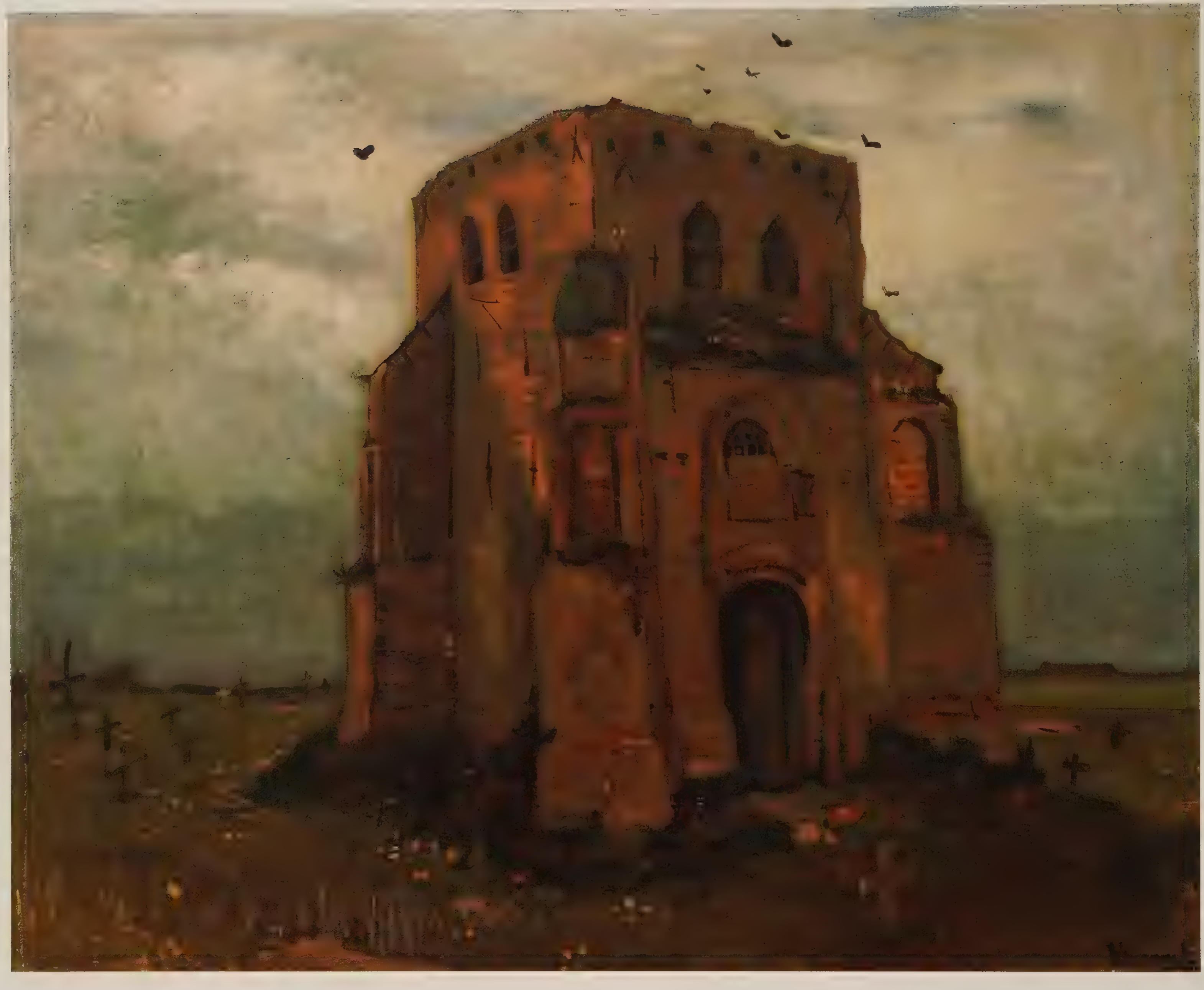
Paradoxically – for today they are so dark as to be barely legible – these still life studies were also experiments in colour. Van Gogh had been immersing himself in contemporary colour theory by reading such French art theorists as Charles Blanc (1814-1881) and Félix Bracquemond (1833-1914), as well as a biographical study of Eugène Delacroix (1798-1863) by Théophile Silvestre (1823-1876). Both Blanc and Bracquemond used Delacroix as their prime example of a forceful colourist, and in their wake Van Gogh began to cite the importance of Delacroix, despite his lack of familiarity with the artist's work. Nevertheless, at a theoretical level, he was able to learn how Delacroix made up his palette and retained the vibrancy of his colours by applying them in separate strokes of juxtaposed complementaries. It was with his mind full of Delacroix that he made a special trip to Amsterdam and spent long hours in the newly opened Rijksmuseum, absorbing the lessons of Rembrandt and Frans Hals, analysing their techniques and above all their use of colour.

If the painting of the family vicarage was valedictory, so too, in a more overt way, was *Still life with Bible* (ill. 32). Painted with gusto and confidence shortly before Van Gogh's final departure from Holland in November 1885, it shows his late father's bulky Staats Bible open at the book of Isaiah, with





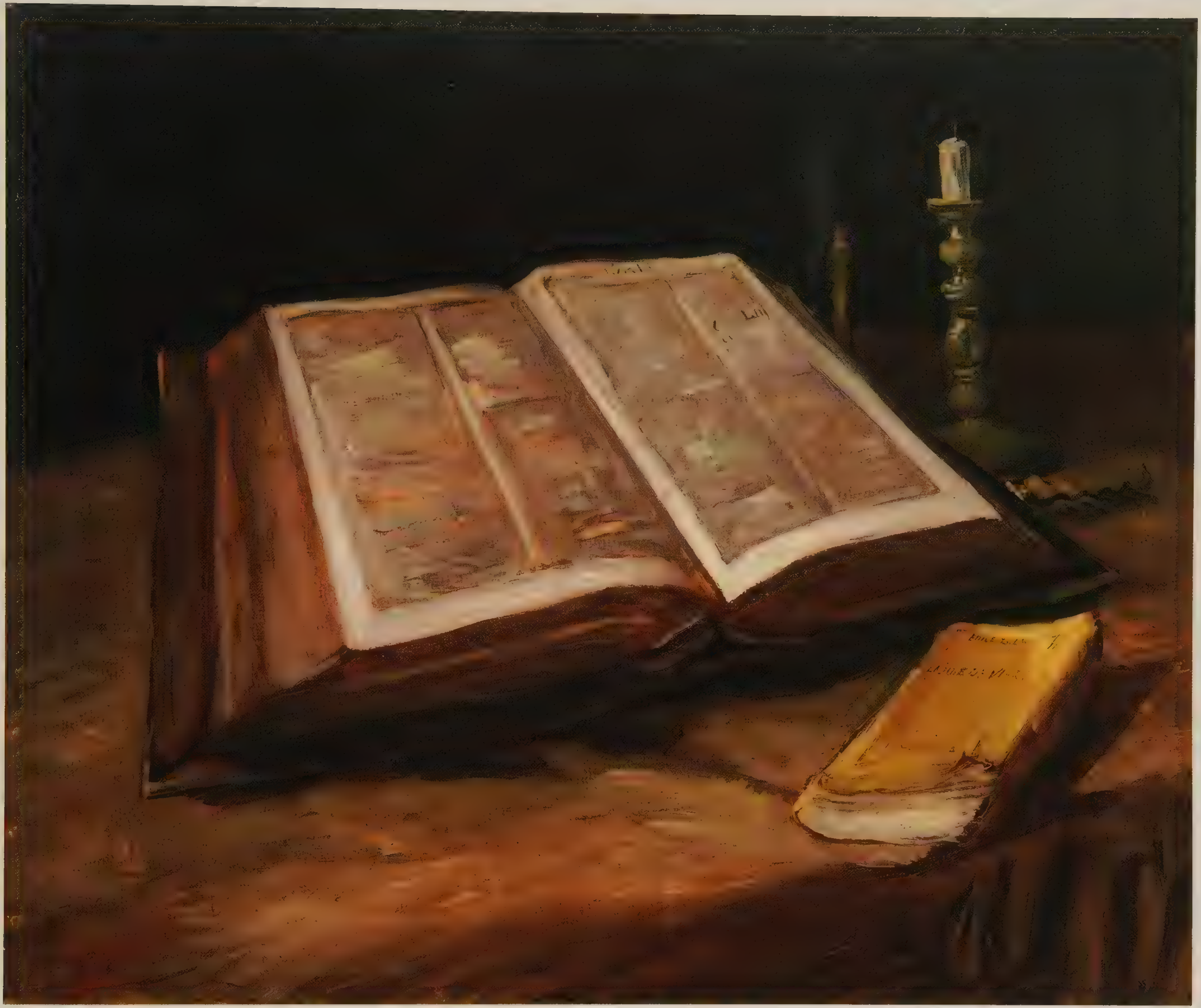
30
Basket of potatoes
1885
oil on canvas
51 x 66 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



31
The old church tower at Nuenen
1885
oil on canvas
65 x 80 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

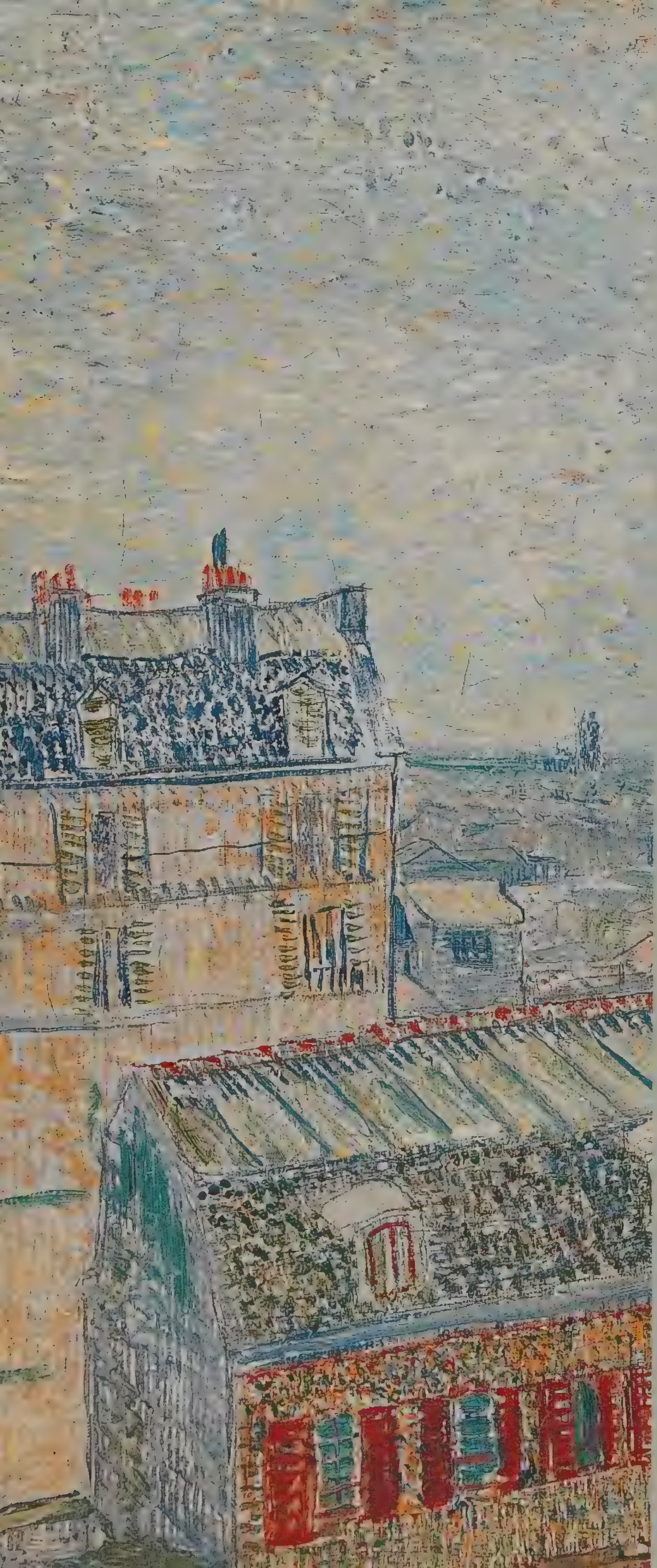
a gutted candle beside it, standing out white against the deep browns of the background. Providing a bright, buttery yellow note in the foreground is an entirely different kind of book, a dog-eared pocket-size paperback, Emile Zola's *La Joie de vivre*, which had been published the year before. Like a traditional *Vanitas* image, the composition contains a series of counterbalances invoking life and death, light and dark, colour and monochrome, levity and seriousness. It is as though Van Gogh aligns himself here with the modern French novel, of which he was an increasingly avid reader, and its more pliable and ironic philosophy (for *La Joie de vivre* is emphatically not a joyful book), in opposition to his father's self-righteous inflexibility.

In late November 1885, Van Gogh set off on foot for Belgium. He was eager both for more contact with the world of painters and pictures and to



test his own progress against the example of the masters. This was only possible in a city where mainstream art was taught, practised and marketed. For a Dutch artist the nearest such international centre was Antwerp.

32
Still life with Bible
1885
oil on canvas
65 x 78 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

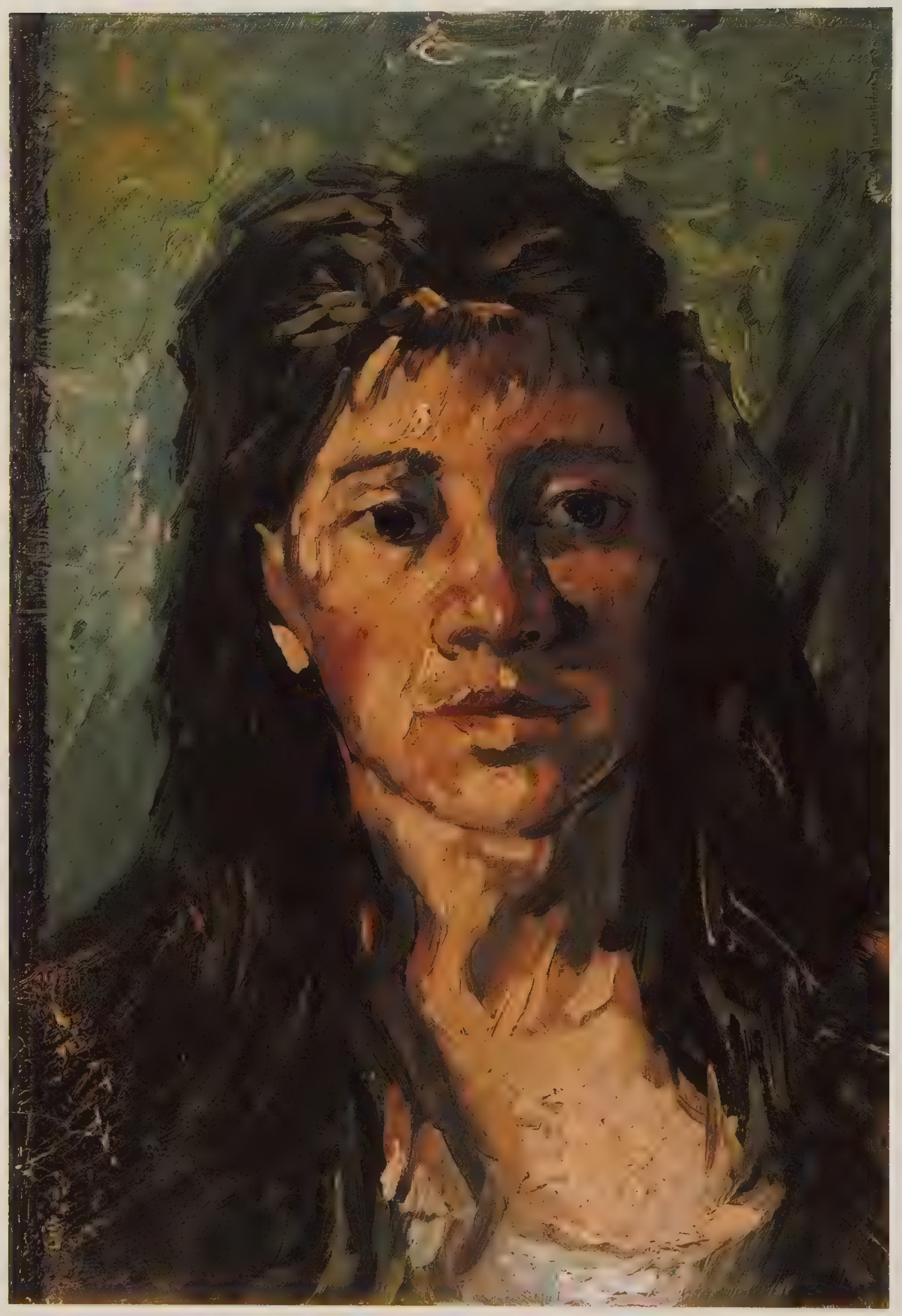


1885–1888

Antwerp and Paris

Confronting the avant garde

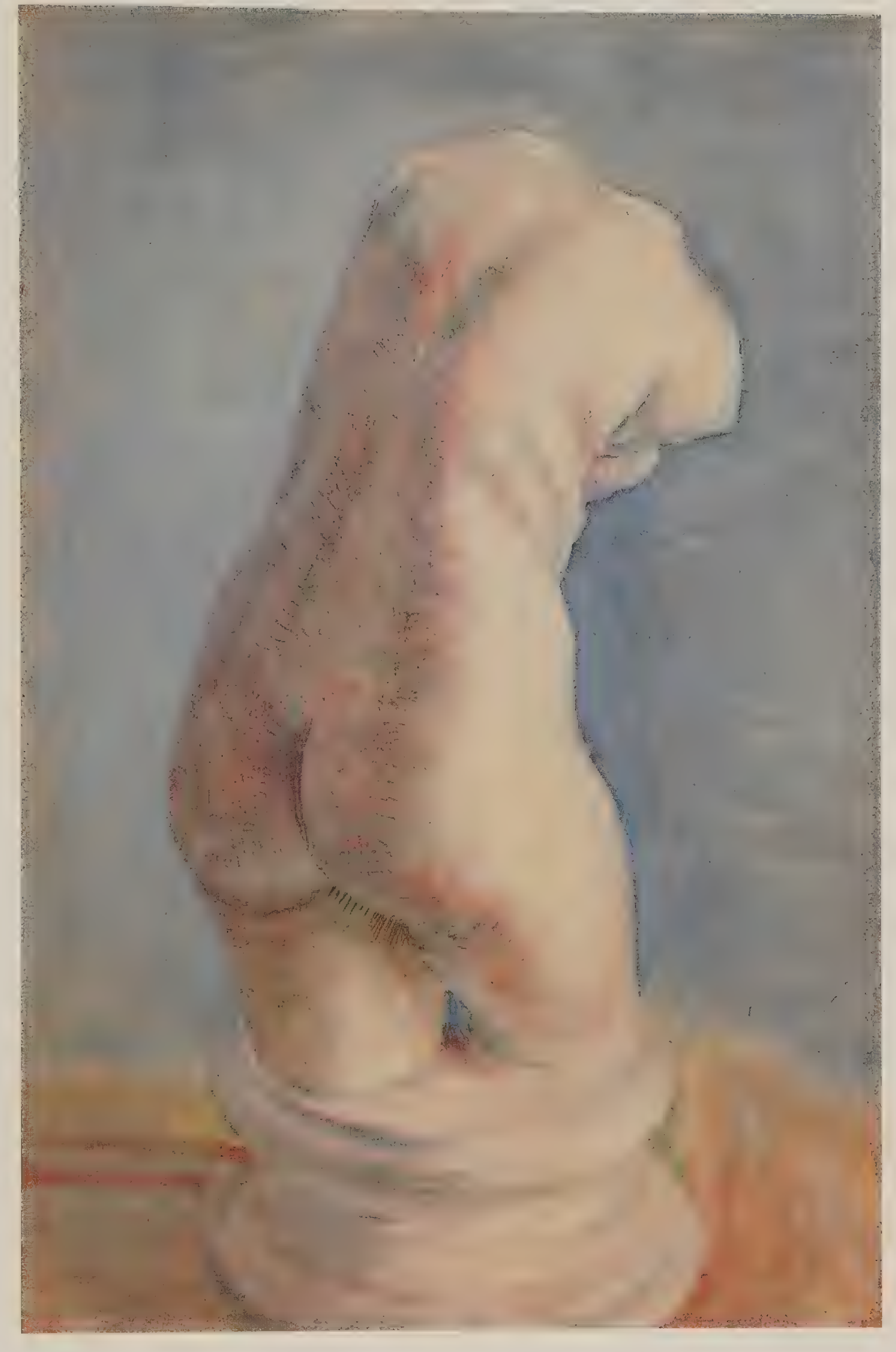
WHILE IN ANTWERP, Van Gogh enrolled at the academy, where he drew from plaster casts, and at two drawing clubs, where he was able to work from the nude. However, his robust, angular style can scarcely have been appreciated by his teachers, whose conventional notions of draughtsmanship were all about emphasising contour. Little of what Van Gogh achieved as a figure draughtsman in Antwerp survives. However, the city did lead him to make a vital discovery: he began to study Japanese prints and acquired a first batch of them.



33
Head of a woman
1885
oil on canvas
35 x 24 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

The few paintings that survive from the three months Van Gogh spent in Antwerp include a cluster of freely painted portrait heads, which were a direct response to seeing an impressive range of work by that city's illustrious baroque master, Peter Paul Rubens. Although he had misgivings about Rubens's 'superficial' understanding of human nature – he was no match for Rembrandt – Van Gogh recognised a place for his own ambitions within the robust, painterly and colouristic tradition that Rubens represented.

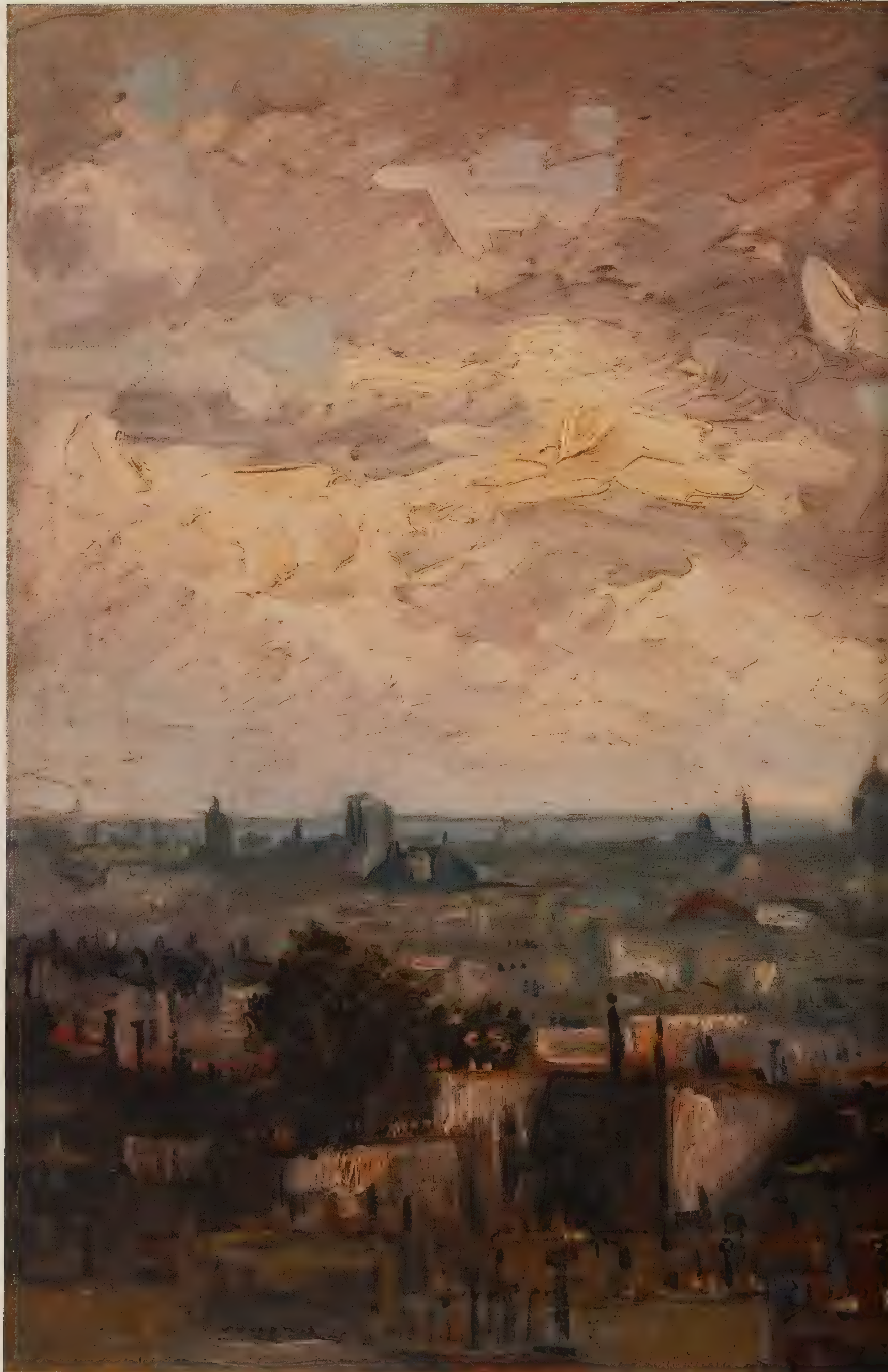
His stated preference for sitters from the 'common class' persisted; he persuaded a performer from a café-chantant to model for him (ill. 33), seeking to 'capture both the desire and sadness of that woman' [553/442]. This

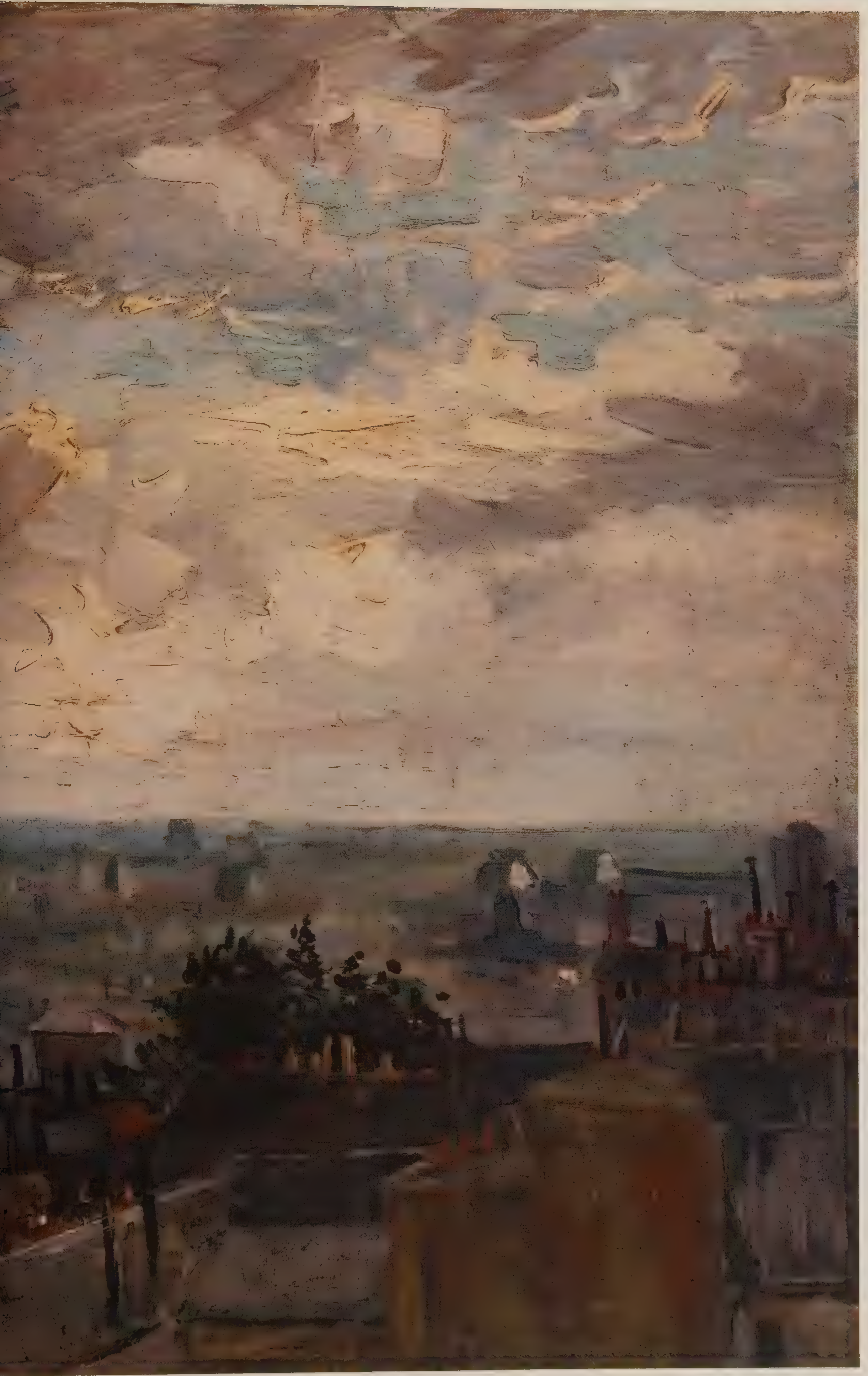


34
Plaster figure of a female torso
1887
oil on canvas
40 x 27 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

uninhibited little portrait shows him applying Rubensian lessons in colour, using a brighter palette overall and introducing bold touches of red and green into the flesh tones.

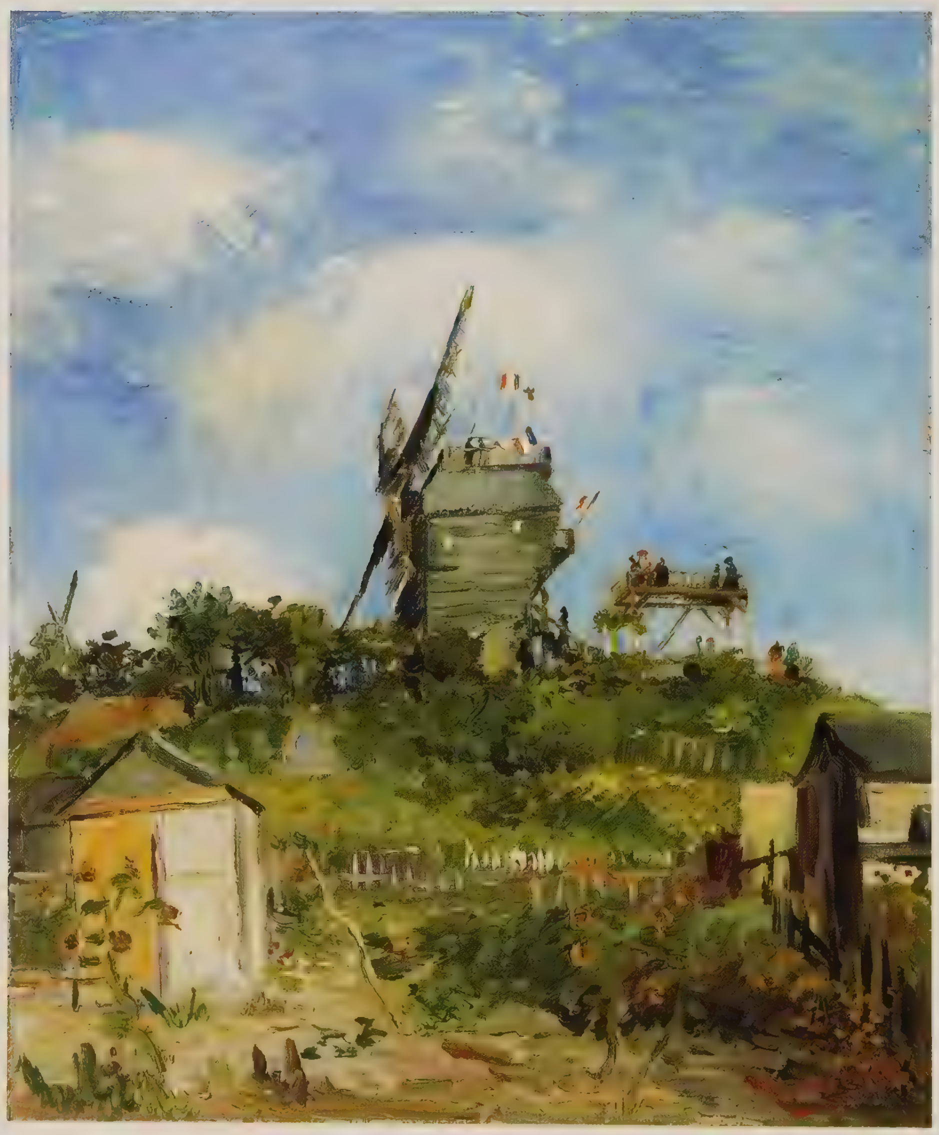
PARIS 1886-1888 By March 1886 Van Gogh at last felt confident enough as an artist to exploit the stimulus Paris could bring him without losing sight of his long-term artistic objectives. His mind, through his reading, was well stocked with French ideas; now he would allow his eye and hand to



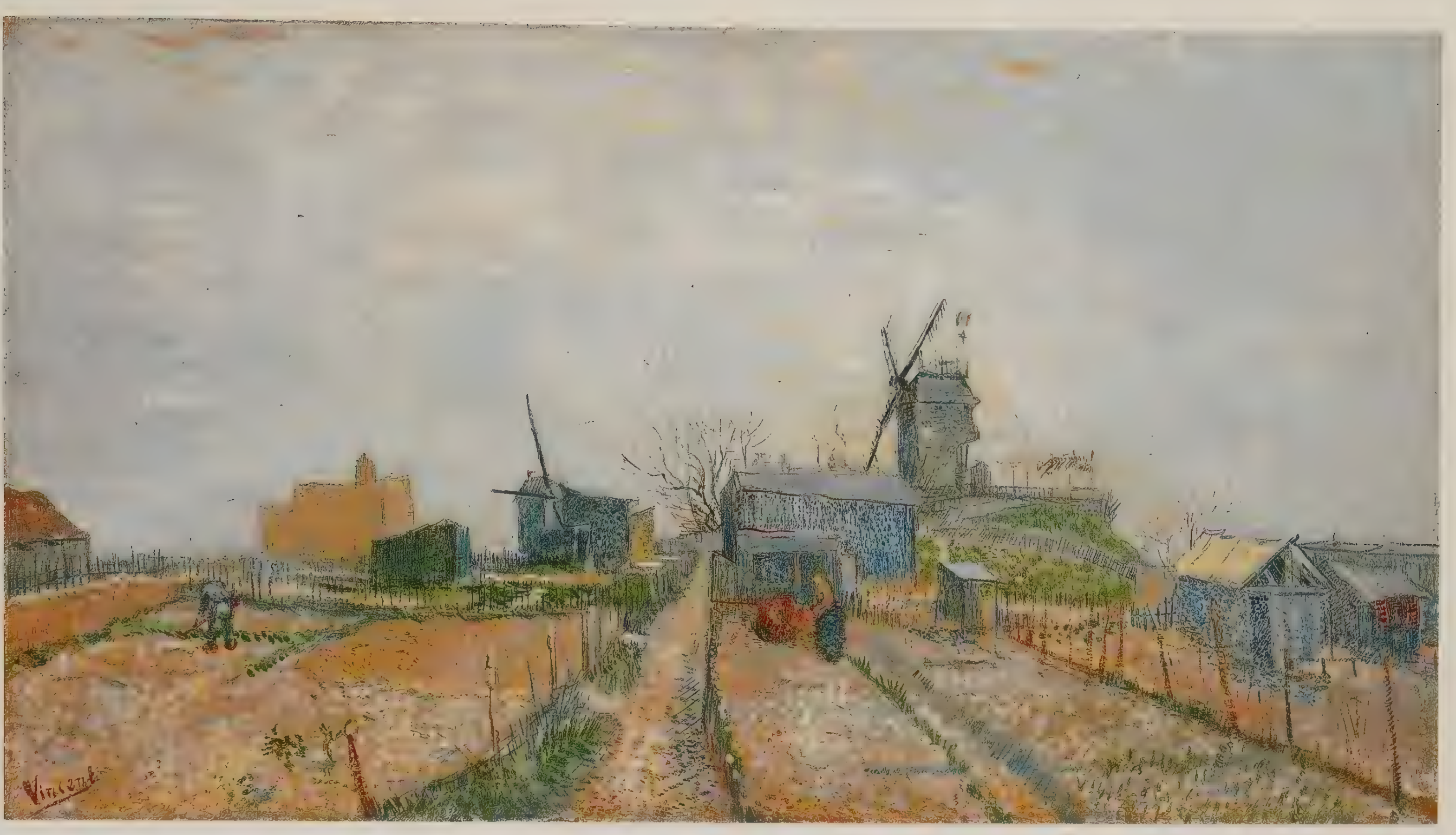


35
View of Paris
1886
oil on canvas
54 x 72 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

absorb and experiment with new French ways of working. Theo had for some considerable time urged him to come to Paris, then the acknowledged capital of European art. However, Theo warned his brother that his way of painting, particularly his palette of deep browns and earth colours, would be out of step with the bright prismatic hues that had been introduced by the Impressionists. Theo was sure that seeing what his French peers were doing would have a profound and salutary impact on Vincent's work. Ultimately he was to be proved right, although that impact did not manifest itself immediately or in a predictable way in Van Gogh's painting. For one thing, he did not confine himself to looking at his contemporaries. First he sought to refresh his memory of the work of Delacroix and other masters in the Louvre. The remarkable variety of subjects and styles with which Van Gogh experimented between 1886 and early 1888 and the number of canvases he repainted over unsatisfactory attempts are indicative of the confusing messages he absorbed from French painting.



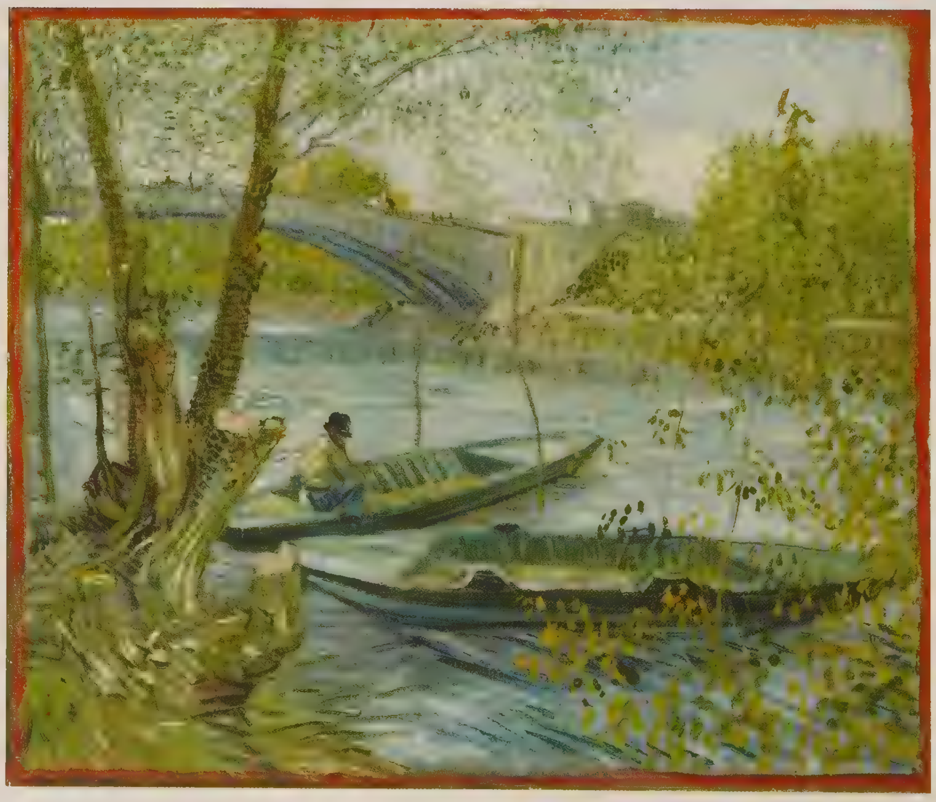
36
Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre
1886
oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm
Glasgow Art Gallery



37
Vegetable gardens and the Moulin de Blute-Fin on Montmartre
1887
oil on canvas
43 x 80 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

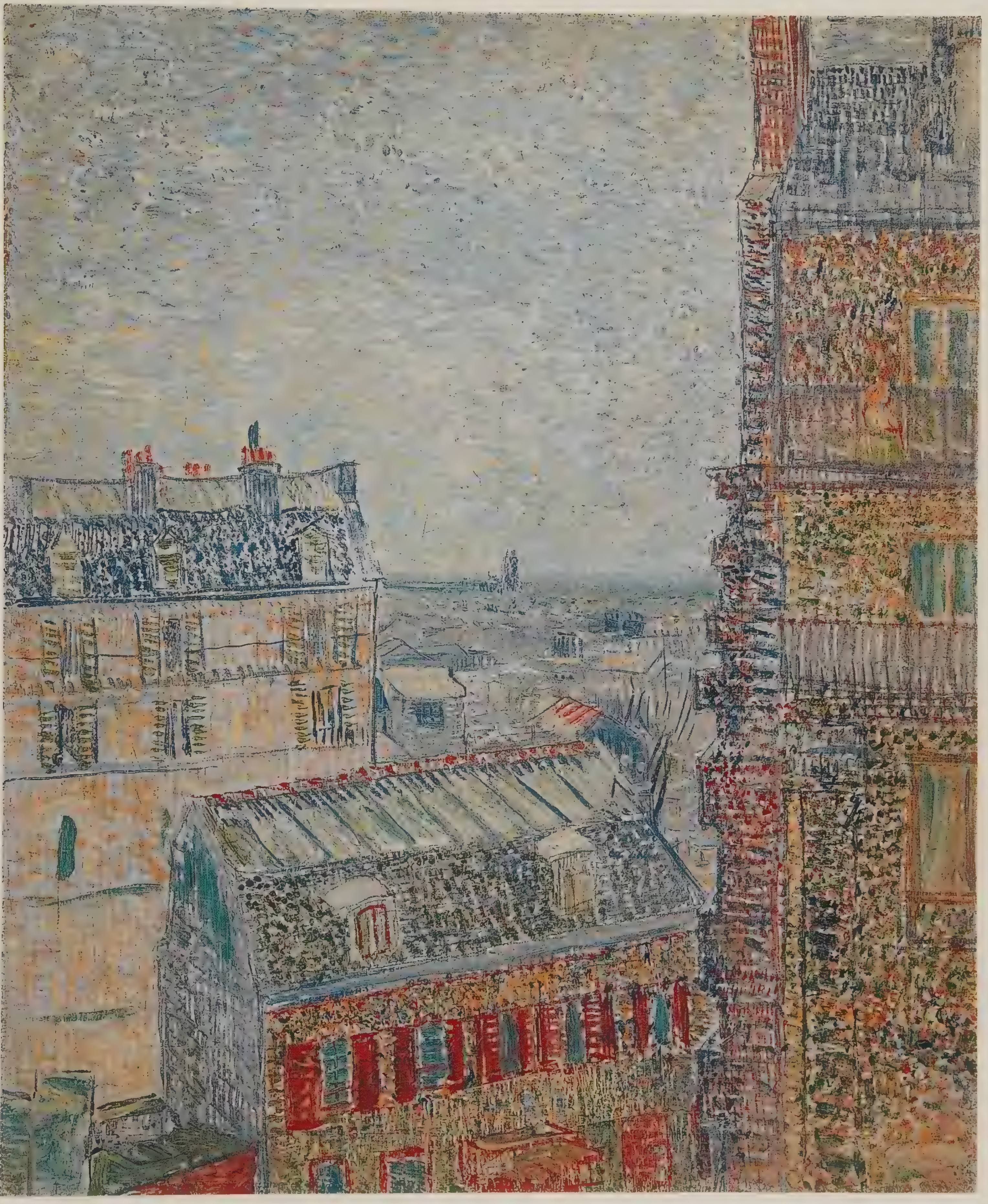
LOOKING OUTWARDS Van Gogh sensibly took his time to look around him and come to terms with his new surroundings before launching into new subjects. In September, he confessed in a letter to an English friend from Antwerp that after six months in Paris he was not yet of the Impressionist 'club', and that his own developing theory about colour was somewhat different from theirs [572/459a]. Indeed, it was not until he had spent over a year in Paris that one could say he was working in a loosely impressionistic manner. The various exhibitions on offer that first summer, from the eighth and last Impressionist exhibition held in May through to the Salon des Indépendants in August, gave him an ideal opportunity to confront a jangling cacophony of contemporary styles. His own work, meanwhile, shows him acclimatising more gradually to the physical reality of the city. Van Gogh made a series of landscape views of Montmartre, where he was living with Theo, first in rue Laval and then in rue Lepic. These are broadly painted tonal studies (ill. 35, 36). In conscious emulation of the much earlier work of Georges Michel (1763-1843), who had painted Montmartre when its character was still essentially rural, their palette is tonal and naturalistic, but of silvery green and blue tonality rather than earth colours. The Butte was a convenient location, as its popular windmills offered viewing platforms from which to enjoy panoramic views over the whole city. Socially, too, Montmartre marked the raw junction between urban and rural life. The quarter was fast being colonised by artists' studios and the entertainment world, dance halls, cheap brasseries, circuses. Yet, if one turned one's back on the city, one confronted vineyards and market gardens, which provided a welcome reminder for Van Gogh of the scenes he had enjoyed painting at home (ill. 37). His earliest panoramic landscapes adopt an apparently unrestricted viewpoint and give little sense of the steady incursions being made by the city.

By the spring of 1887 Van Gogh's cityscapes and landscapes began to change in character. There was a brief flirtation with more modern, Monet-like motifs, informal suburban views of the river Seine with its bridges and overgrown banks. Van Gogh tackled several such intimate subjects at Asnières and rendered them boldly, albeit somewhat haphazardly. At much the same time, he began experimenting with the more controlled pointillism that had been demonstrated publicly for the first time in 1886 by Georges Seurat (1859-1891) and Paul Signac (1863-1935). In *Fishing in spring* his brushstrokes veer from a striated impressionism to a more deliberate decorative dotting; and he encloses the composition within a contrasting red painted border (ill. 38). In a series of new views of the city Van Gogh no longer edited out the restricting presence of buildings, but instead exploited the odd angles, hard diagonals and partial vistas that were the typical experience of the Paris apartment-dweller. These works reveal Van Gogh's ambitions as a painter of the modern city, and specifically of the edgy northern suburbs. In the view he painted from his room in rue Lepic



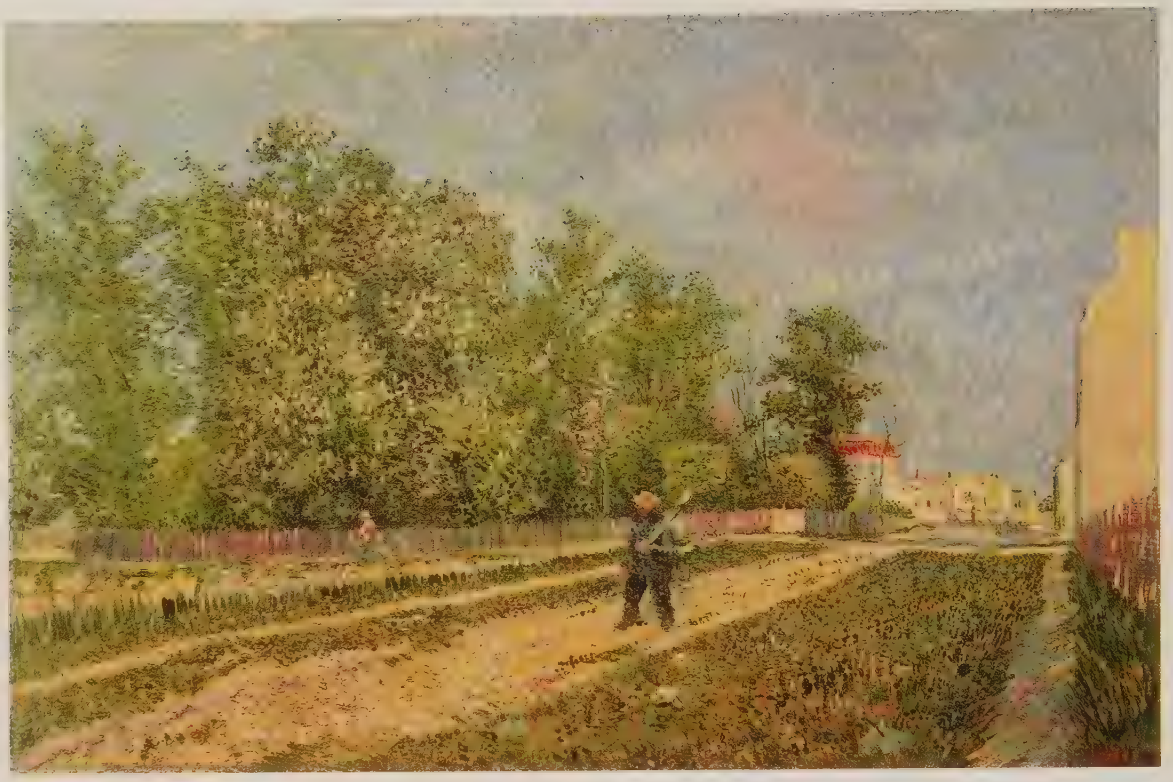
38
Fishing in spring,
the Pont de Clichy
at Asnières
1887
oil on canvas
49 x 58 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago,
Gift of Charles Deering McCormick,
Brooks McCormick
and Roger McCormick

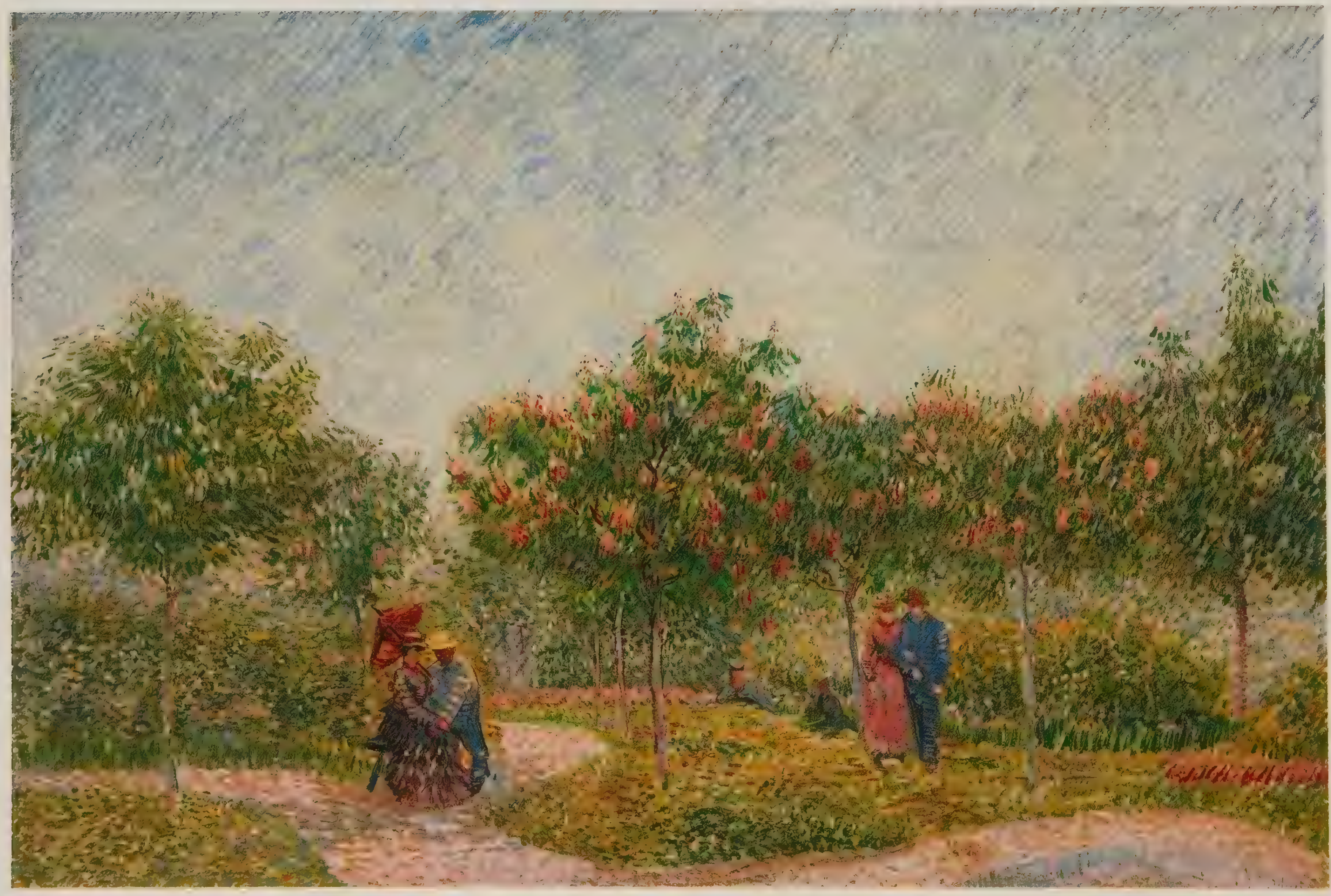
39
View of Paris from Theo's apartment
in the rue Lepic
1887
oil on canvas
46 x 38 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



40
Outskirts of Paris:
road with peasant
shouldering a spade
1887
oil on canvas
48 x 73 cm
Private collection

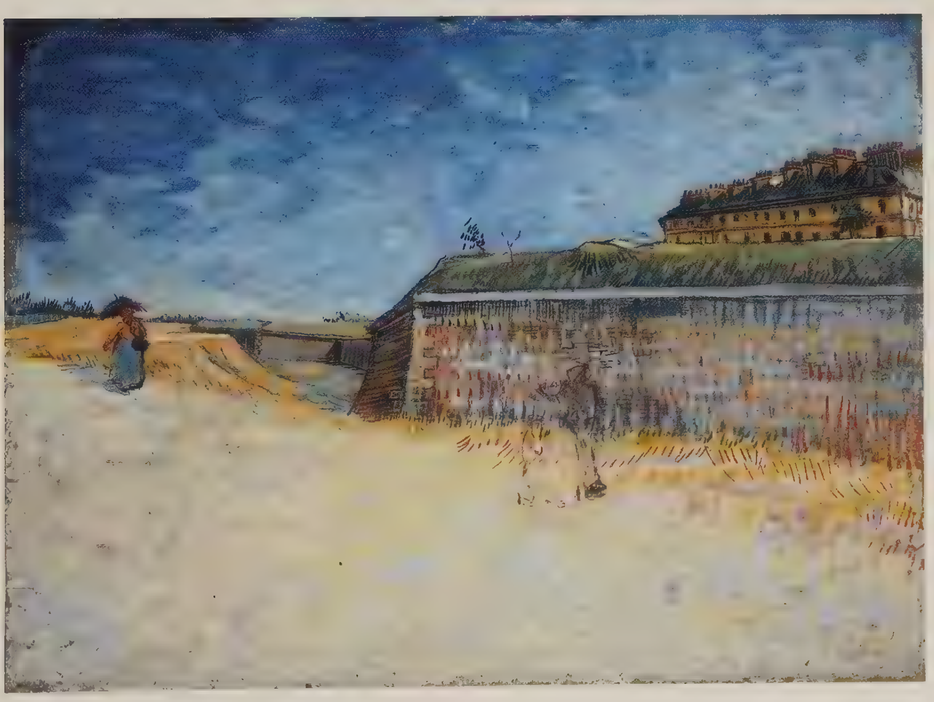
41
Courting couples
in the Voyer d'Argenson Park
in Asnières
1887
oil on canvas
75 x 112 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



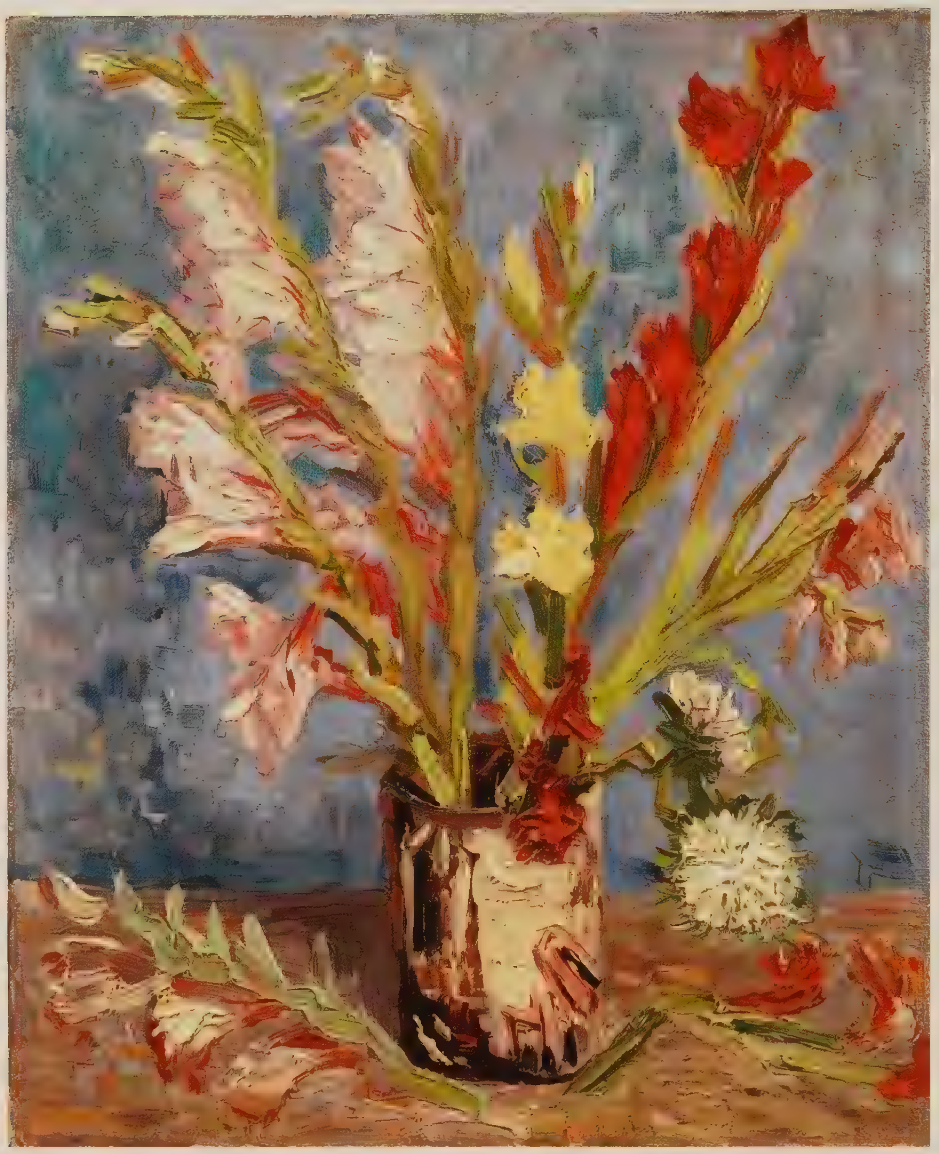


(ill. 39) the medium is lean, the brushstrokes short, staccato and diffuse. The palpable oil-rich paint-application of the Antwerp canvases has disappeared in favour of a skein of skittish marks through which the light-hued canvas is allowed to show. A number of these paintings seem to owe their delicacy to the adventurous mixed media studies on paper Van Gogh was making at the same time (ill. 42).

The drawings of the ramparts and several contemporary paintings reveal Van Gogh's desire to include figures, but hesitancy about doing so. Often Van Gogh's urban figures have a somewhat quaint, squat character, like the figures in Japanese prints (ill. 37, 40). But another possible reason for their awkwardness was the difficulty of transporting into an actual observed scene ideas about people taken from literature; for many of Van Gogh's preconceptions about Paris and its inhabitants had been formed by his voracious reading, and contemporary writers such as the Goncourt brothers (Edmond 1822-1896, Jules 1830-1870) and Zola (1840-1902) played a major part in shaping his urban vision. He acknowledged their importance by painting a number of still lifes featuring modern French novels (ill. 45, 46). Perhaps these writers, rather than objective reality, account for the regular sprinkling of figures of lovers in his views of the Butte de Montmartre, the fortifications or public parks. In *Courting couples in the Voyer d'Argenson Park* (ill. 41) he paints pairs of lovers engaged in amorous dalliance. But rather than evoking the stylishly modern or down-to-earth, brutish love affairs described by Zola, these lovers recall the genteel manner of an eighteenth-century *fête galante* by Antoine Watteau, a genre that had been revived in recent years by Adolphe Monticelli (1824-1886).

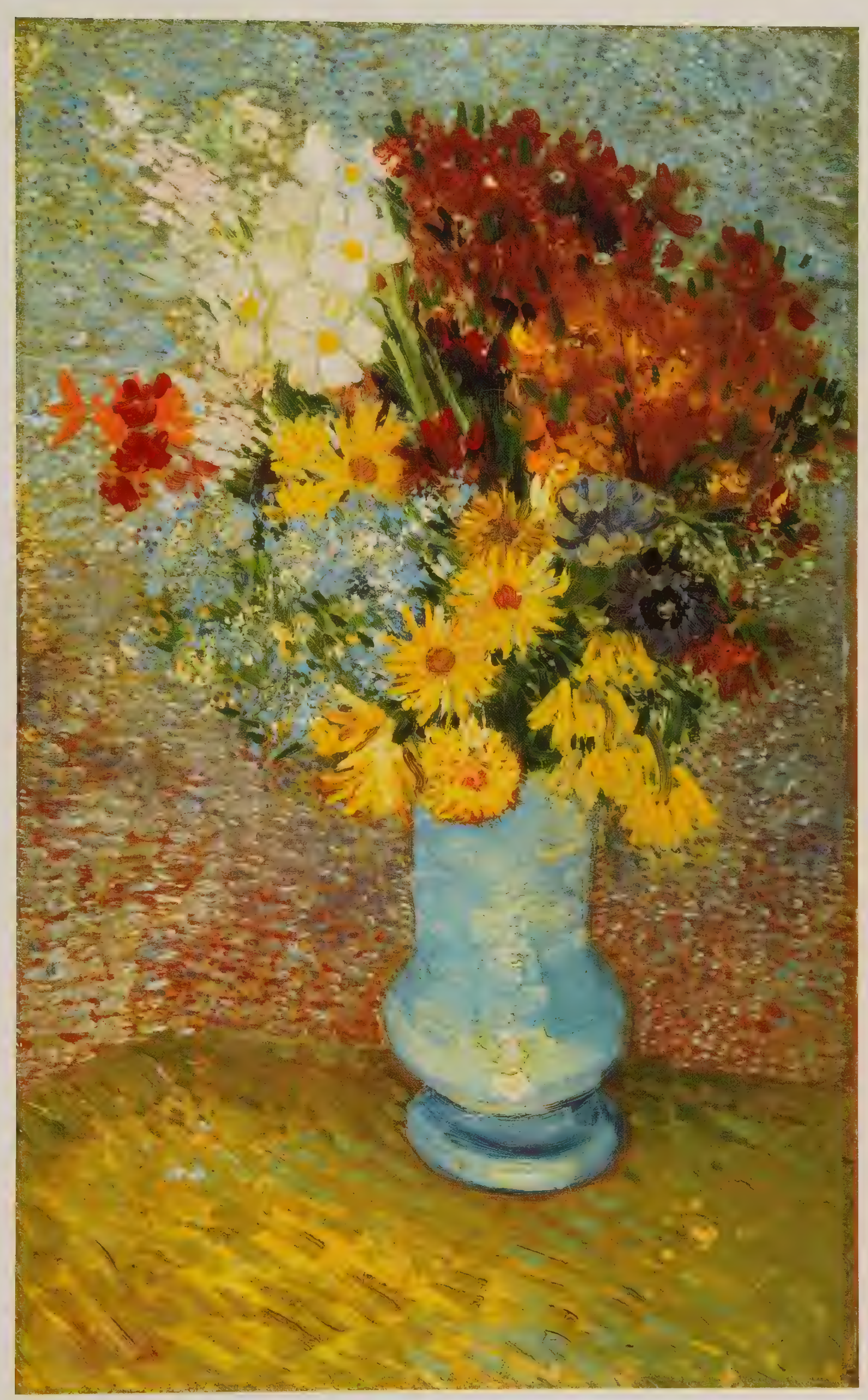


42
The fortifications of Paris with houses
1887
pen and watercolour wash
39.5 x 53.5 cm
Whitworth Art Gallery,
The University of Manchester

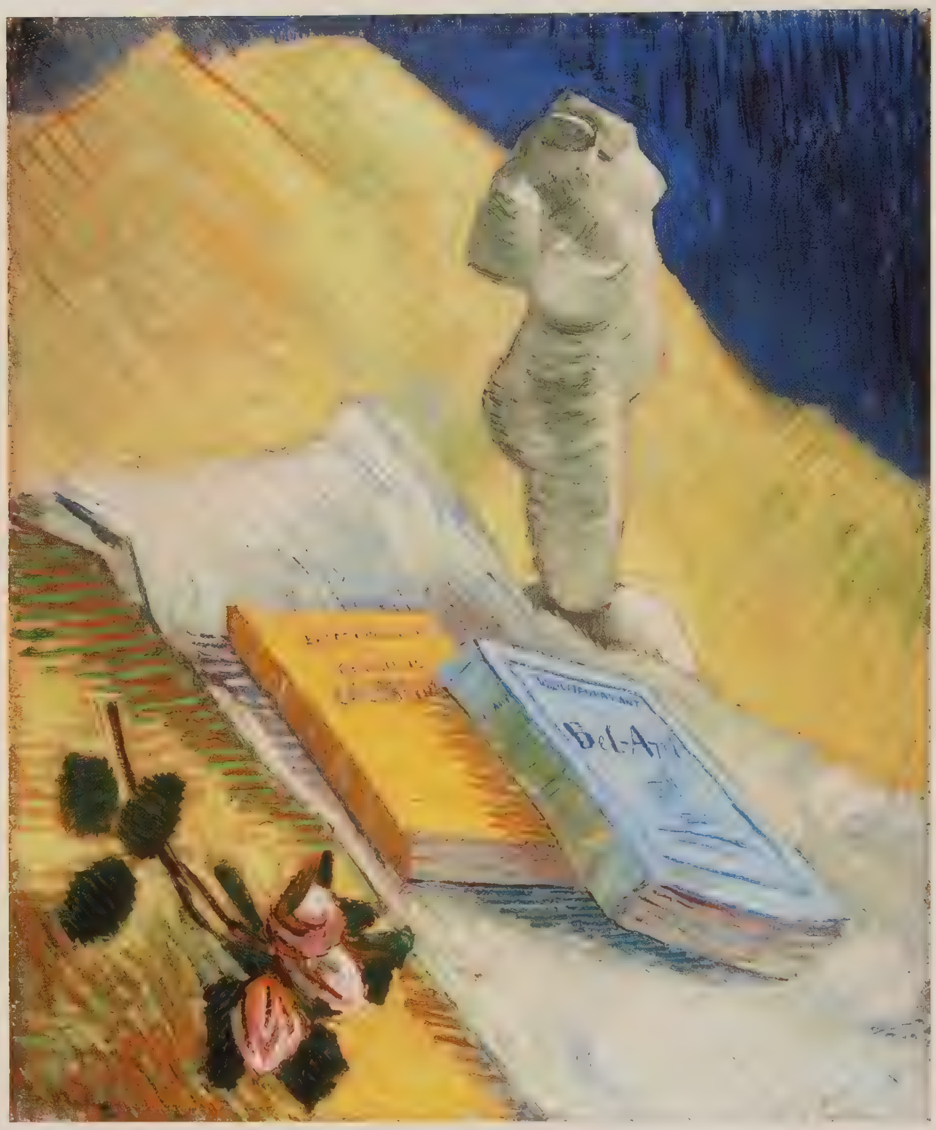


43
Vase with gladioli and autumn asters
1886
oil on canvas
48 x 40 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

LOOKING INWARDS During the summer and early autumn of 1886, Van Gogh had also embarked on a series of flower paintings involving bold colour contrasts. A comparison between an 1886 flower study and one done the following summer points up his rapid stylistic evolution. *Vase with gladioli and autumn asters* (ill. 43), with its loose pairing of complementaries – reds and pinks with greens, yellows with blues – adopts a significantly brighter range of colours than any of his Dutch still lifes; but its handling – oil-rich brushwork that gives a robust palpability to the flowers – is consistent with his recent Dutch work and more akin to Delacroix's way of working than to the Impressionists. Painted a year later, *Flowers in a blue vase* (ill. 44) offers a disparate range of mark-making within a single composition, from the long diagonal and curved strokes that give realistic solidity to the table surface and the vase, to the short, more impressionistic, dabs that correspond to the different flower petals, and the scattering of pointillist blue dots that animate the background. Van Gogh's colour choices here seem to



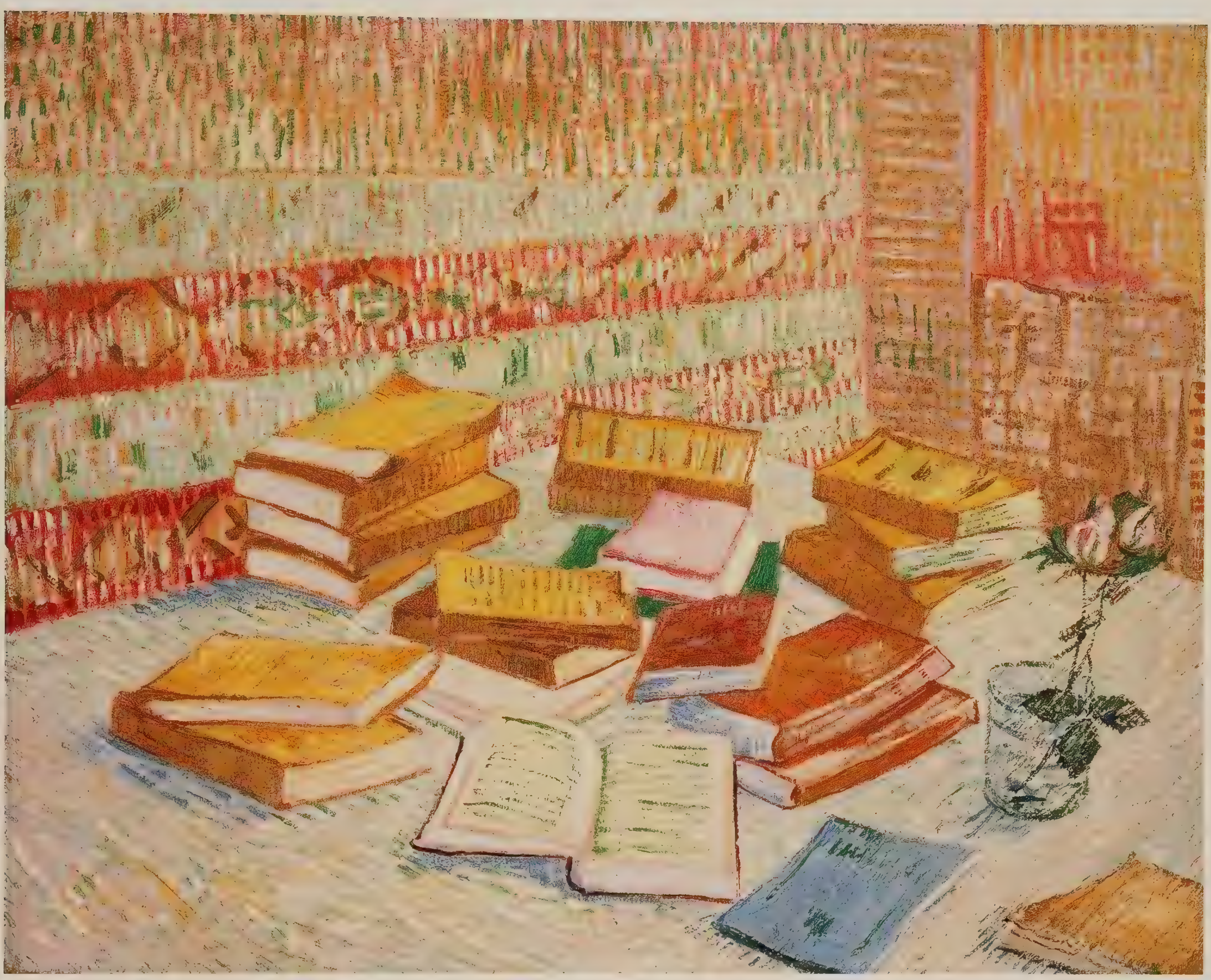
44
Flowers in a blue vase
1887
oil on canvas
61 x 38 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo



45
Still life
with plaster statuette
1887
oil on canvas
55 x 46 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

be governed by a concern for decorative unity: the predominant yellow/blue contrast of the lower flowers and vase carries over into the arbitrary colours used for the table top, while the blue, orange, red and white contrasts that dominate the upper portion of the variegated summer bouquet spill over into the background.

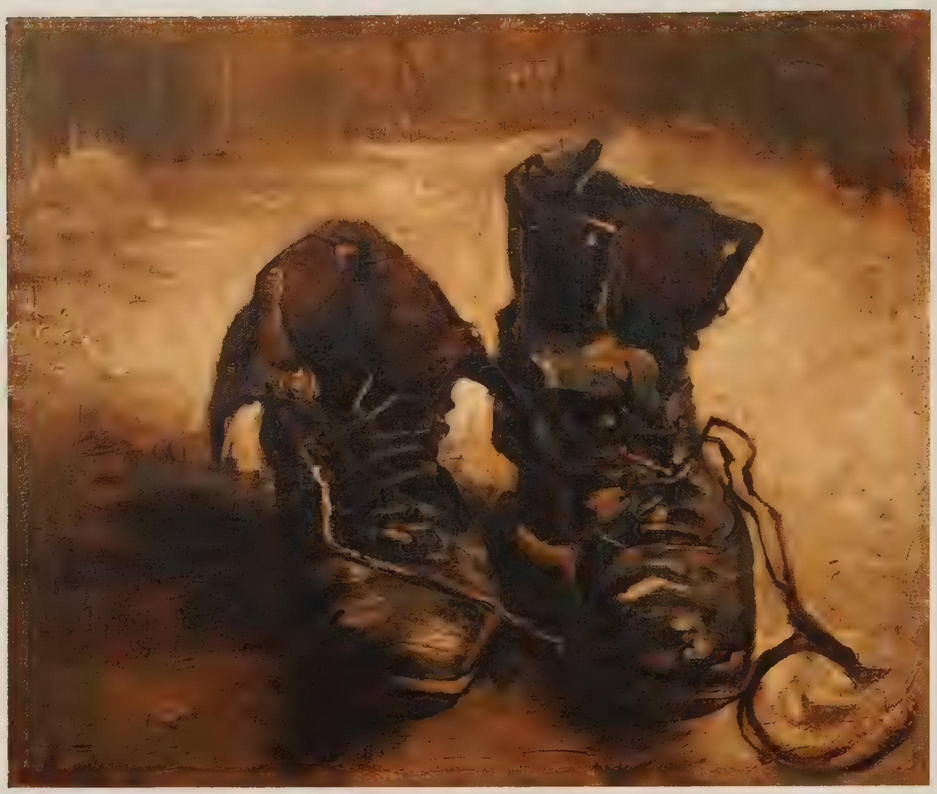
This concentrated campaign of still lifes was a continuation of Van Gogh's experiments in Holland, their relatively neutral motifs offering a safe retreat from the novelty and complexity of the city. But certain of his subject choices were more witty and personal. There is surely a telling contrast between the study of boots painted soon after arrival (ill. 47) and the lighter, more colourful study painted the following year (ill. 48). The former, painted heavily in dark monochrome tones, seems to pay homage to the sturdy footwear that had carried him on his long walks through the Low Countries; the latter, with more modern-looking boots indicated in pale green strokes against a salmon pink background, seems an acknowledgement of his new circumstances. As Van Gogh's remarkable series of Paris



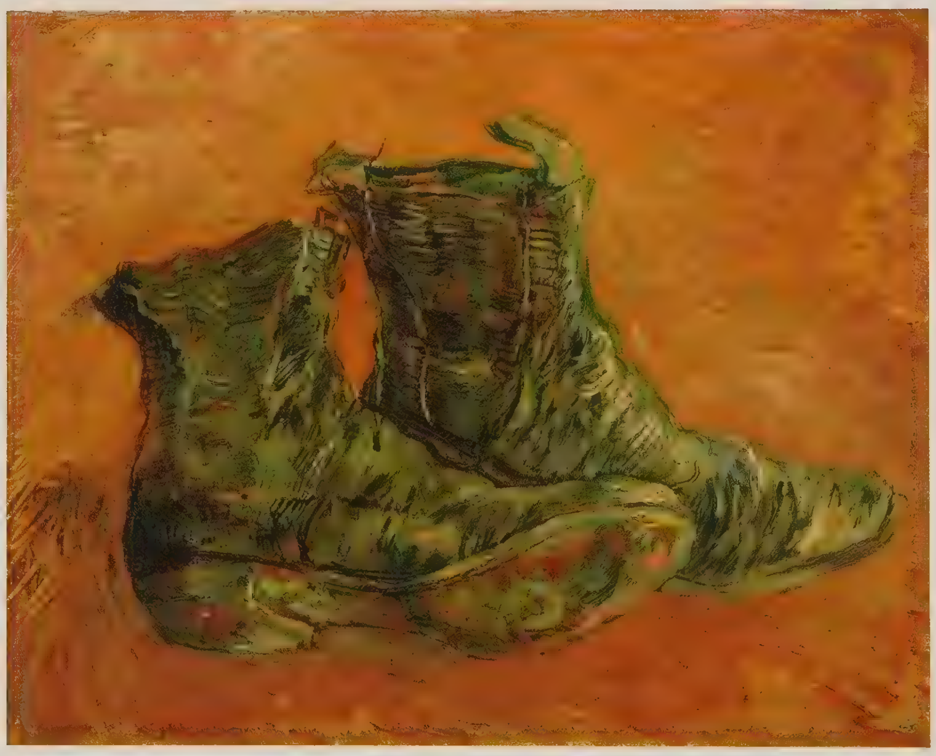
46
Still life
with Parisian novels
1887
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Private collection

self-portraits demonstrates (ill. 50, 51, 52, 53), city living made certain social requirements of the painter, which he had been happily able to ignore whilst living in the country: he made a certain effort to spruce up his appearance, had some dental work done (in Antwerp) and acquired a smart jacket with piped collar. But the idiosyncratic dabbed and striped brushwork of these portraits and their absorption in the effects of complementary colours deliberately counter the more conventional style of contemporary realist portraiture, brought up to date by an awareness of photography. This style is well exemplified by the arrestingly lifelike portrait of Vincent (ill. 49) painted by Van Gogh's Australian friend John Russell (1858-1930), a valued addition to the Van Gogh brothers' personal collection.

The reason often given for Van Gogh's concentration on self-portraiture in Paris is the lack of available models, but an equally important factor was

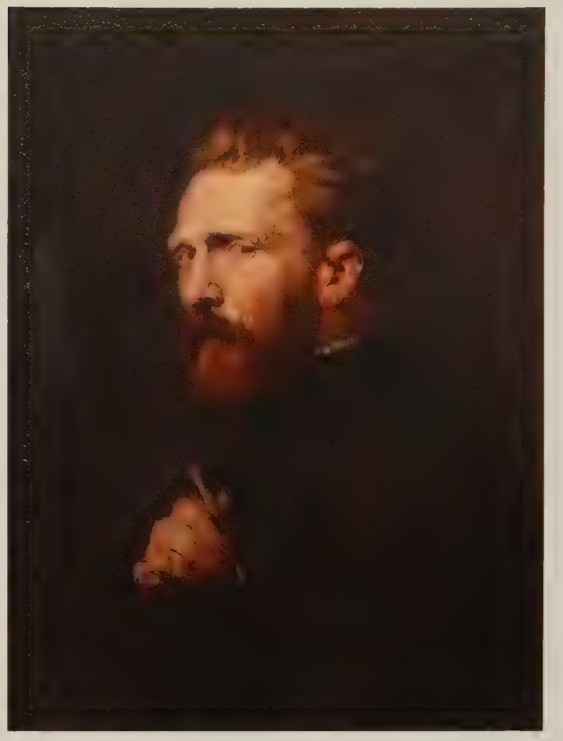


47
A pair of boots
1886
oil on canvas
37 x 45 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



48
A pair of boots
1887
oil on pasteboard
33 x 41 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

surely the freedom to experiment with new techniques and capture and project different looks: the informal but penetrating *Self-portrait with straw hat*, for example (ill. 50), incomplete and sketchy though it is, looks like a determined attempt to present himself as the outdoor, *plein-air* painter. One also senses a curiosity on Van Gogh's part about his changing personal status, a wish to see himself as others saw him, in other words an indication of a growing self-awareness vis-à-vis the Parisian avant garde. The last of the self-portraits Van Gogh painted in Paris, *Self-portrait as an artist* (ill. 52), was also the most ambitious and carefully staged. Now, almost two years after his arrival, he has wholly abandoned the tonal chiaroscuro he had brought from Holland; with its several different types of mark-making, the work is a controlled demonstration of his command of a new style of painting, and, notwithstanding the somewhat overwrought red-eyed look, a confident assertion of his role as modern artist.



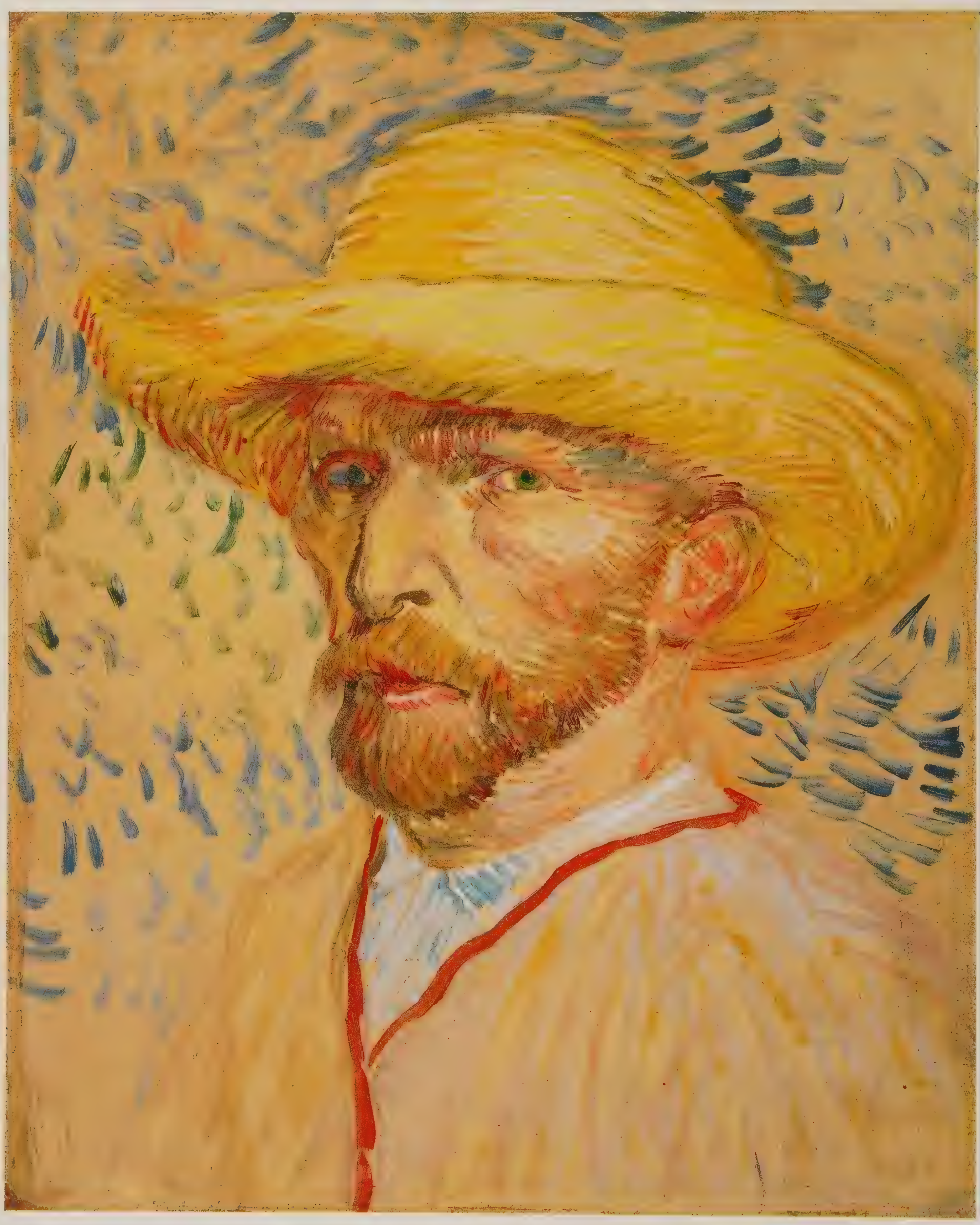
49
John Russell
Portrait of Vincent van Gogh
1886
oil on canvas
60 x 45 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

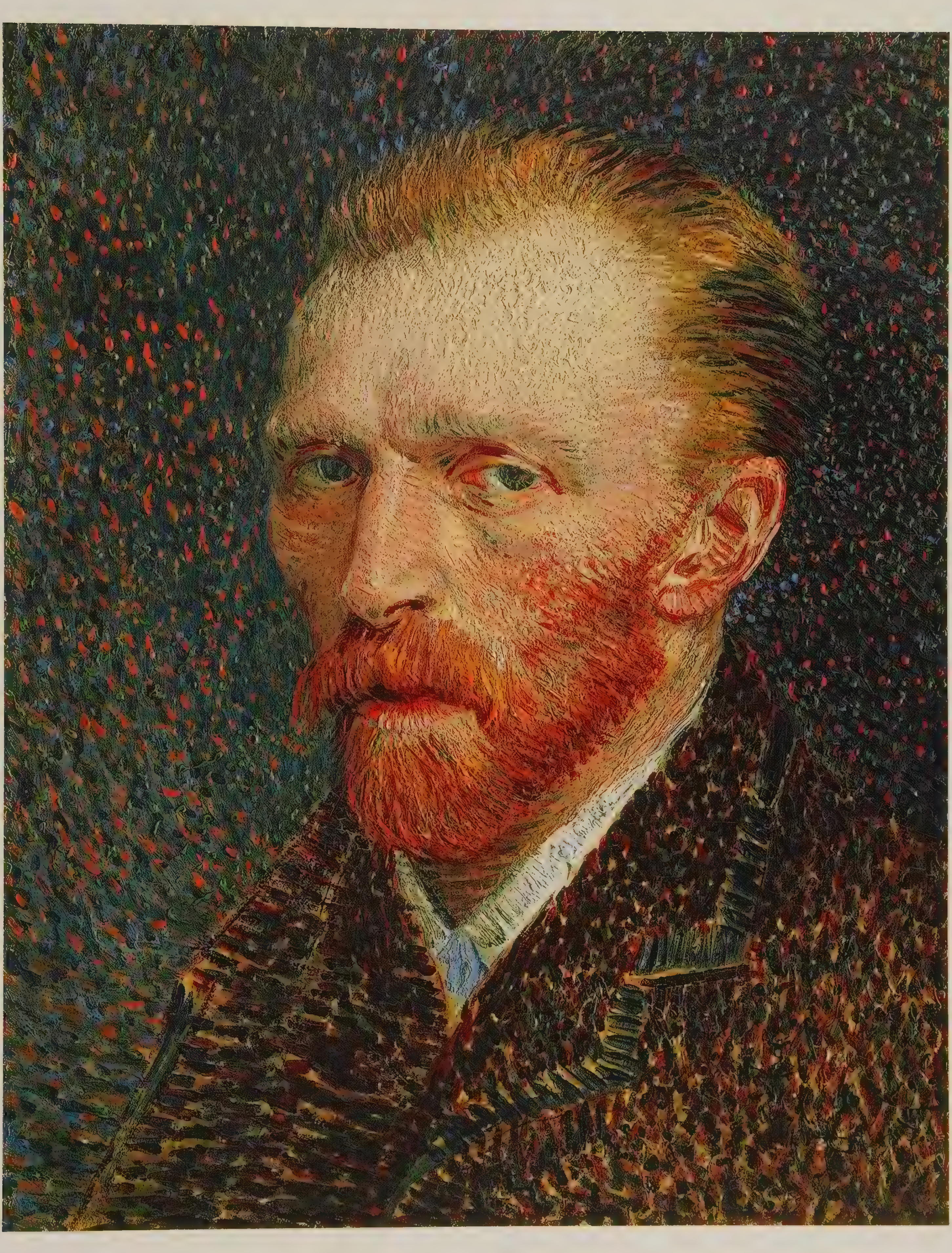
› 50
Self-portrait
with straw hat
1887
oil on pasteboard
40 x 32 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

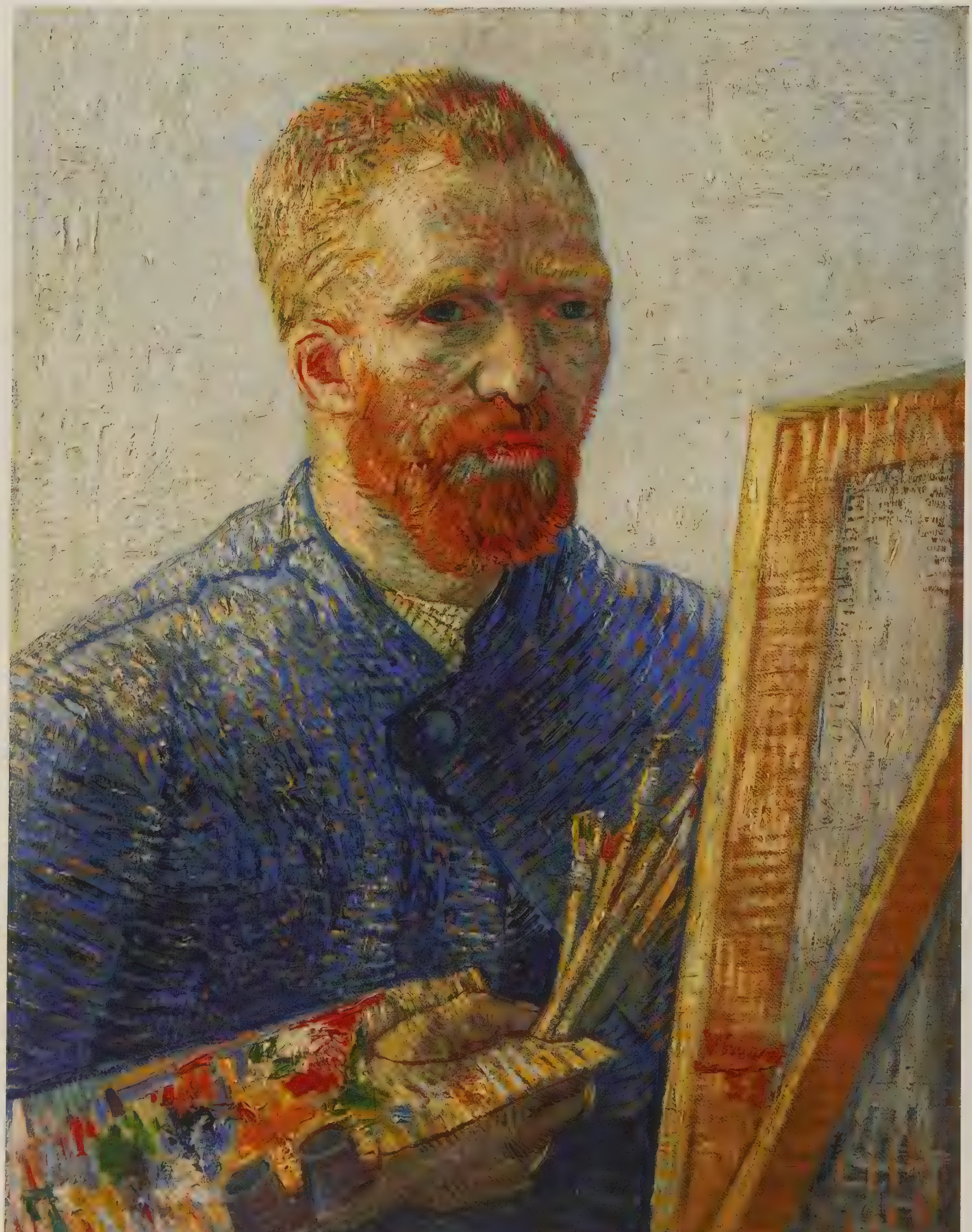
› 51
Self-portrait
1887
oil on cardboard
41 x 32 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago,
Joseph Winterbotham collection

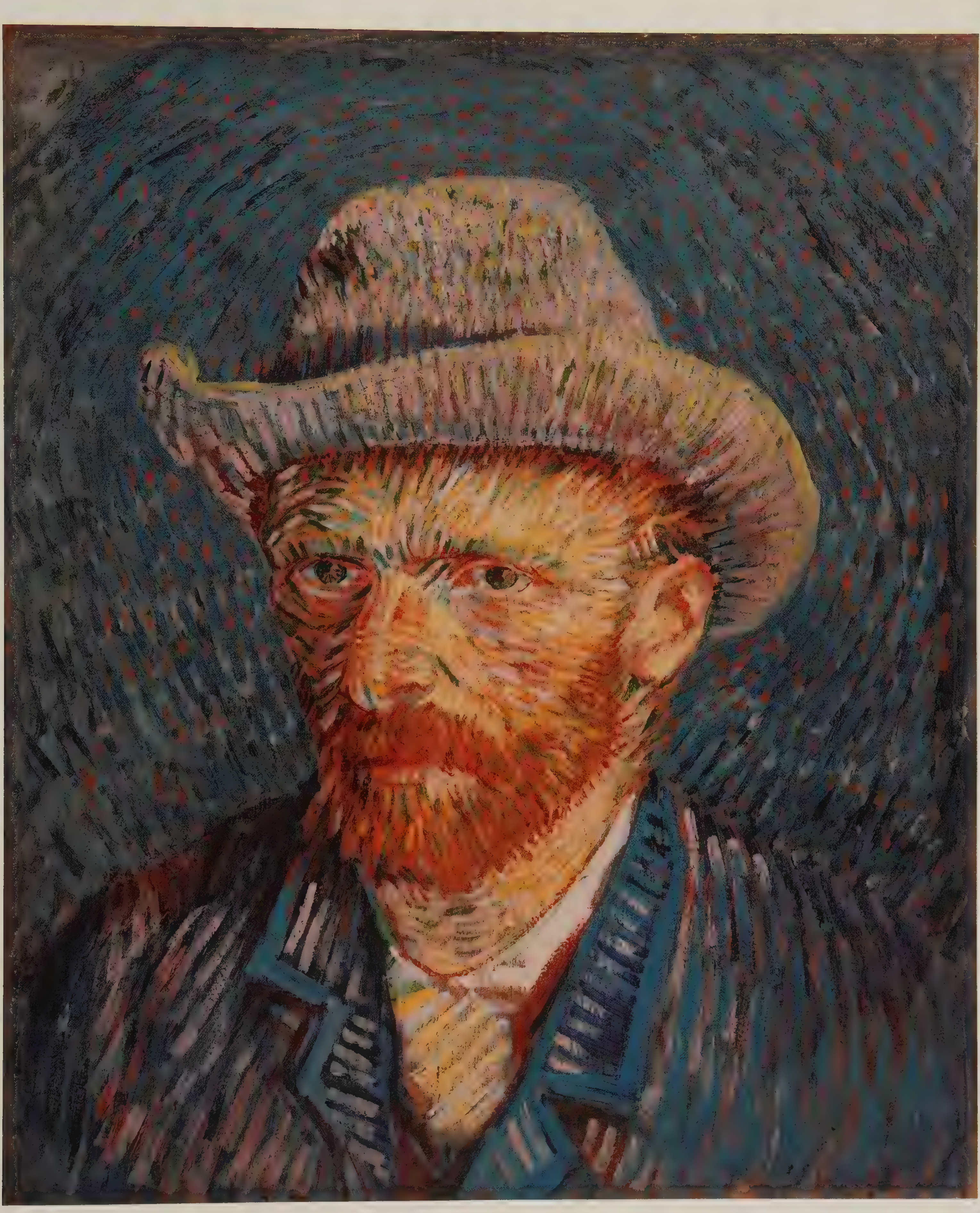
CONFRONTING THE AVANT GARDE One of Van Gogh's objectives in coming to Paris was to meet other artists. And by the time he left in early 1888 his circle of friends and acquaintances among the rising avant garde, as well as among the more established leaders of the Impressionist movement, was impressive. He had become a close friend of the young Emile Bernard (1868-1941). He had exchanged work with a number of others, including John Russell, Lucien Pissarro (1863-1944) and Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), a member of the Impressionists and five years his senior. With both Bernard and Gauguin Van Gogh went on to have a fruitful exchange of ideas through correspondence.

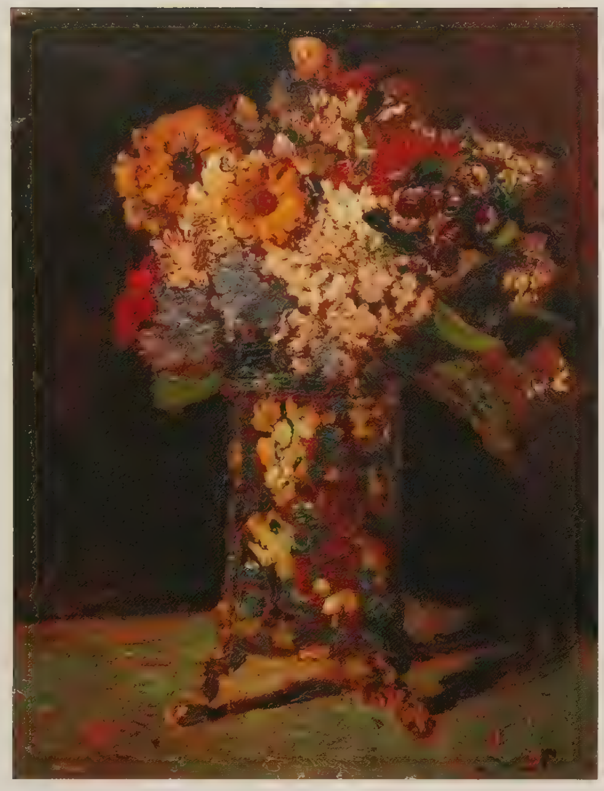
It is remarkable that Van Gogh, a foreigner in Paris and socially somewhat gauche, even irascible, seemed to succeed so unerringly in identifying the artists of talent of his generation. It was partly due to his attending the art school run by Fernand Cormon (1845-1924), an academic painter who had the reputation of being one of the more flexible teachers in Paris. Not that he derived anything but confirmation of his hatred of academic teaching from the experience of drawing from plaster casts there. Another factor was the increasingly active role Theo was now playing, on behalf of Goupil's, in promoting modern art and seeking out representatives of the new movement. Then there was the personality of Van Gogh himself. Eccentric though he was, the Dutchman clearly impressed those who met him with his vehemence in argument, his wide range of reference, his obvious commitment to his artistic ambitions and his willingness to identify with theirs. He was no timid neophyte, ready to fit in with fashionable modes of thinking. He was not afraid to be out of step. There was a marked disparity between his old fondness for impasto, for instance, and the new glancing Impressionist techniques designed to capture sunlight effects. Few shared Van Gogh's impassioned enthusiasm for the flower pieces and romantic *fêtes galantes* of Monticelli, but he was not to be swayed and continued to admire the Provençal painter's gutsy use of heightened colour (ill. 54).











One suspects that a committed Neo-Impressionist like Signac valued the robust intellectual exchanges he could have with Van Gogh. In the spring of 1887 the two painters met in Asnières, while exploring the suburban landscape with its seemingly unpicturesque juxtapositions of leisure and work, river, railway and towpath, open fields, factories and new apartments. When Signac left for the south of France at the end of May, Van Gogh continued to exploit this north-western edge of the city, which could be easily reached on foot from Montmartre, and to develop the ideas they must have discussed. These undoubtedly included the project of representing ordinary working Parisians in their modern urban environment, a theme that had given rise to Seurat's recent masterpieces. One of Van Gogh's most ambitious canvases, *Bridges across the Seine at Asnières* (ill. 55), is a complex composition made up of man-made structures crisscrossing the space – horizontal bridges, vertical piles, funnels and chimneys – enlivened with little touches of human activity: an engine driver, figures in boats, a fashionably dressed lady strolling in pink with a red parasol. As in several of his riverside scenes, Van Gogh applied the paint in streaking parallel strokes, a useful device for conveying the ripples of the water. The painting has strong affinities with certain views painted by Signac (ill. 56) and by Emile Bernard.

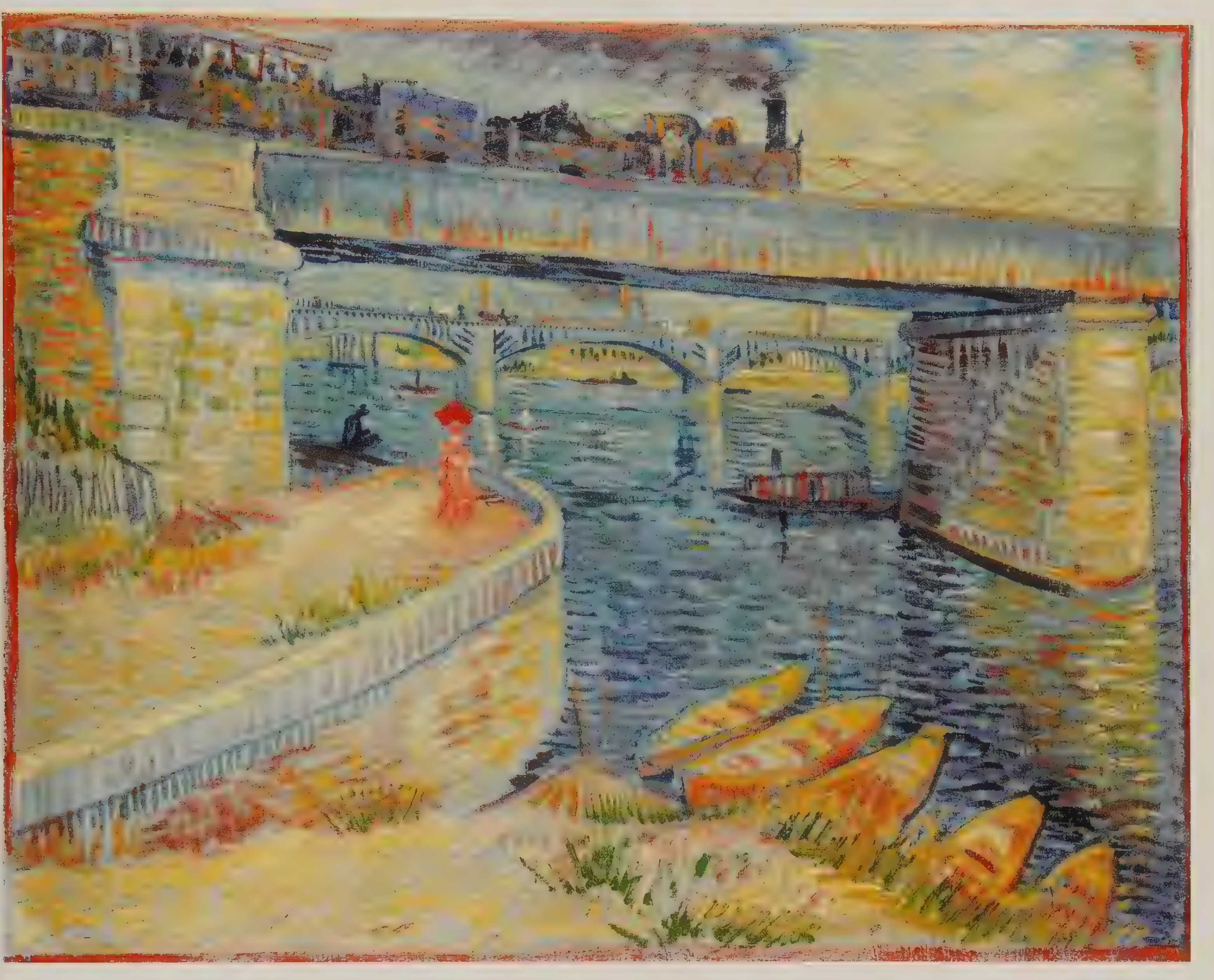
Neo-Impressionism's method of analysing light through the juxtaposition of complementary colours was based on colour theory and quasi-scientific principles. Although the method makes an appearance in Van Gogh's 1887 Paris work, he did not attempt to apply it systematically. For Van Gogh the dotting method had the secondary – and highly desirable – effect of unifying the painted surface through its regularisation of the artist's brushwork. He later spoke of his intense admiration for the calm artistic personality that could be discerned from Seurat's disciplined technique. While he never expected to achieve an equivalent calm in his own work, short hatched parallel strokes became a hallmark of Van Gogh's mature painting style, as did swift execution and heightened colour. Indeed, he saw this vibrant style as an apt pictorial equivalent for the liveliness, wit, spikiness and immediacy of contemporary French novel writing.

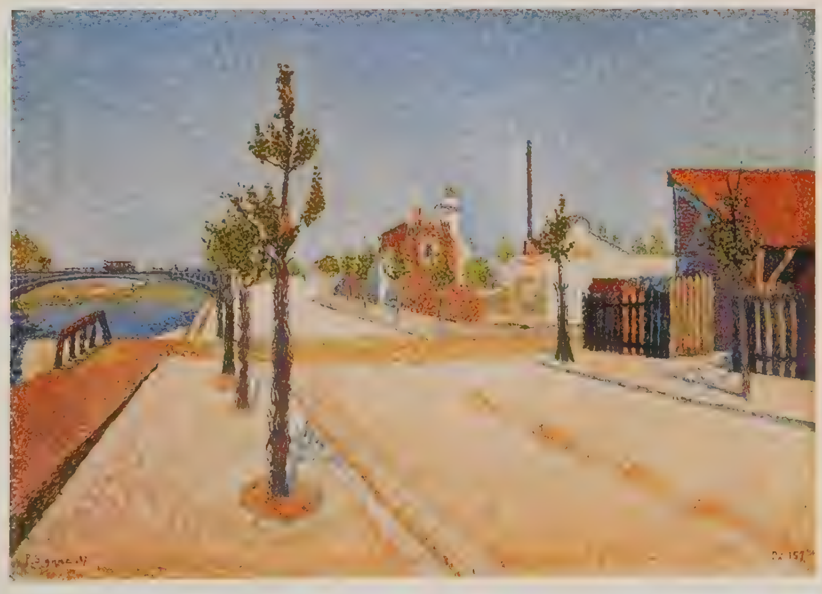
Two new studies of allotments on the hill of Montmartre – painted in vibrating dabs across the whole surface – demonstrate how much Van Gogh's technique had evolved in a few months (ill. 57, 58). In these works he seems to have abandoned the attempt to incorporate figures, concentrating instead on the patchwork of structures, sheds, greenhouses and, on the

‹ 52
Self-portrait as an artist
1887-88
oil on canvas
65 x 50 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

‹ 53
Self-portrait with felt hat
1887
oil on canvas
44 x 37 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

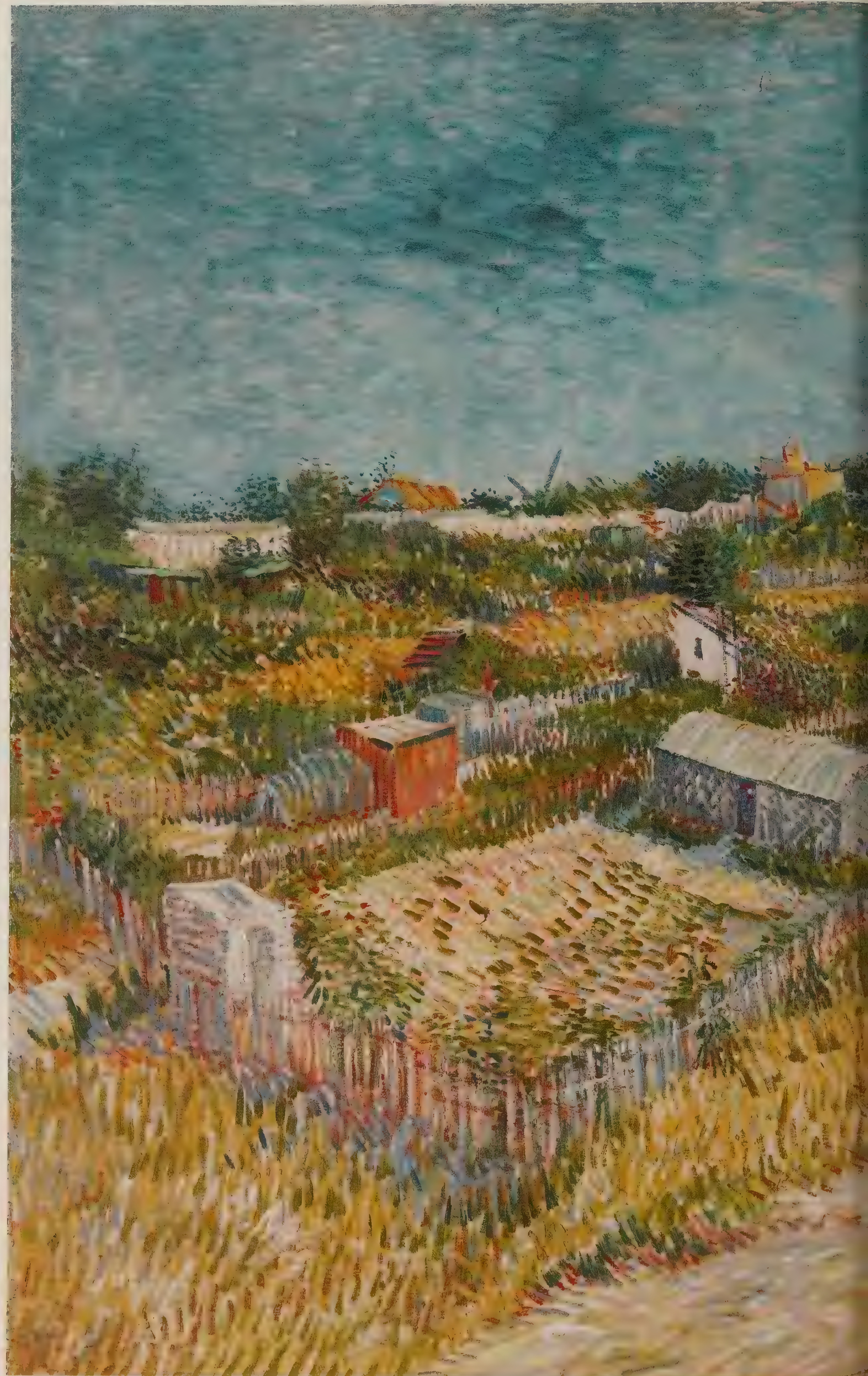
54
Adolphe Monticelli
Flower still life
c. 1875
oil on panel
51 x 39 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

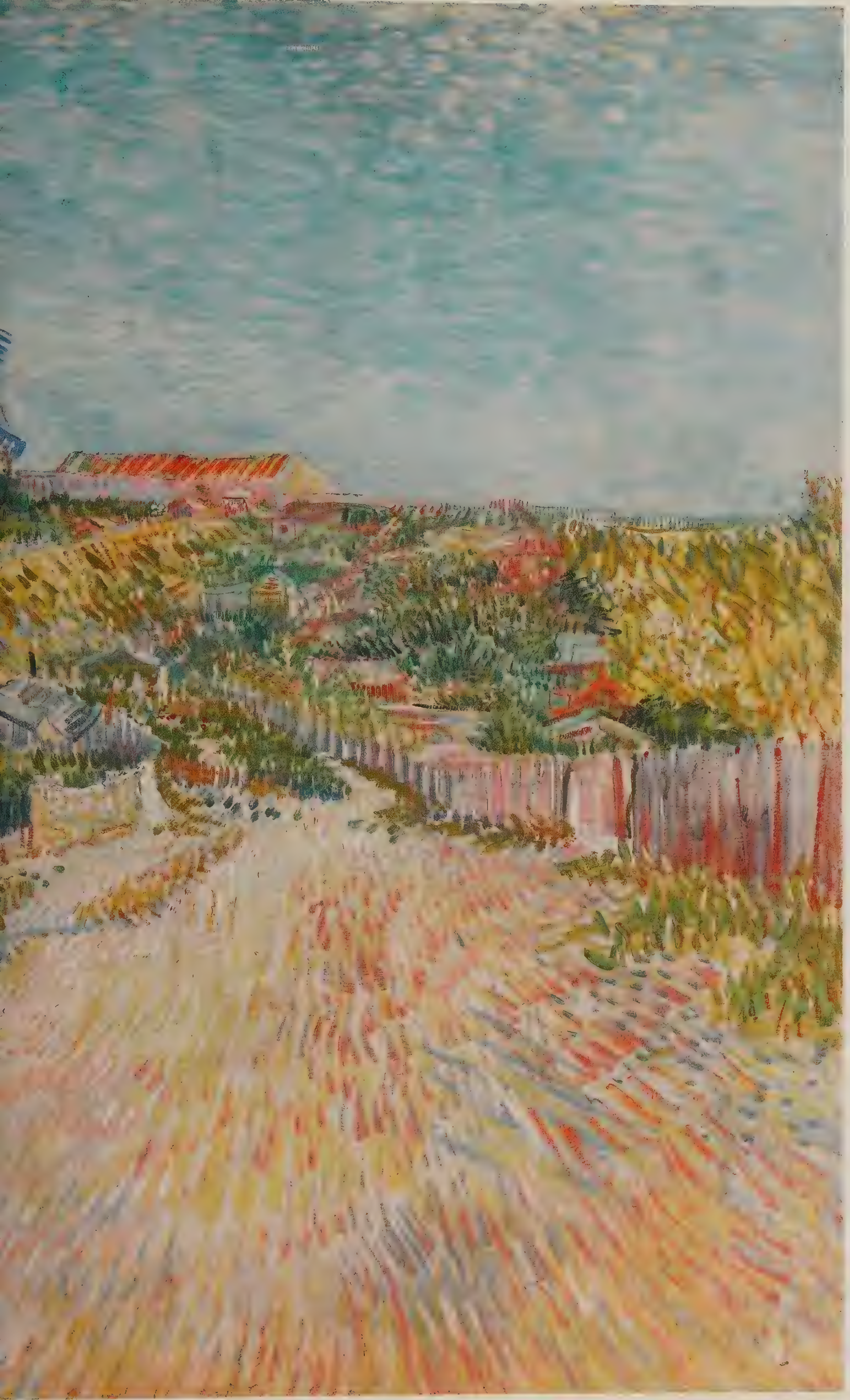




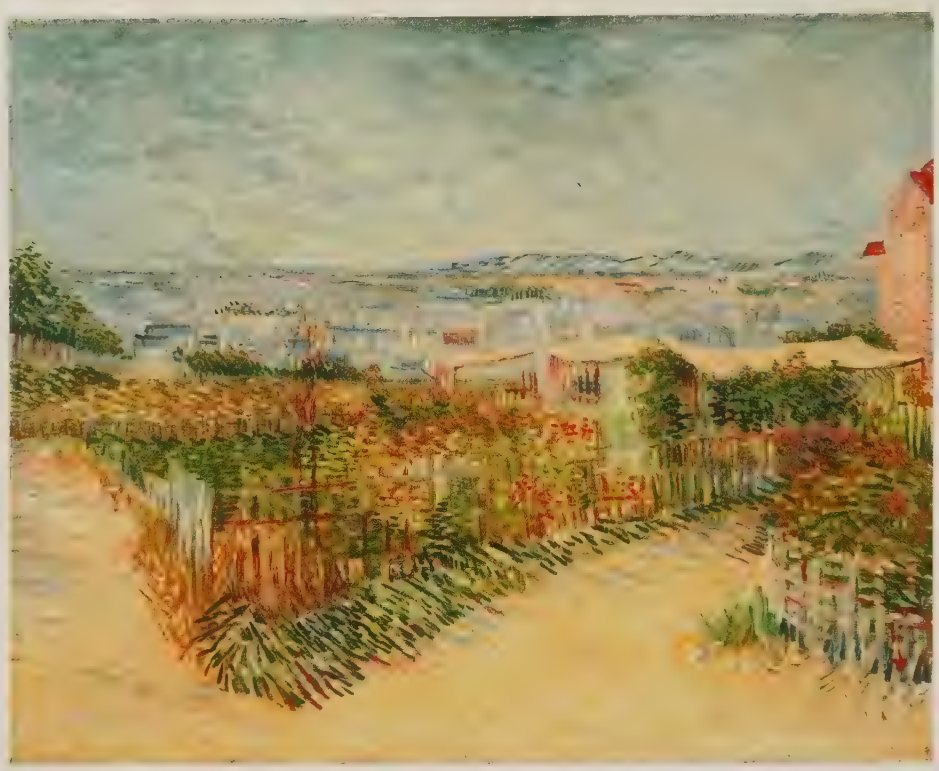
55
Bridges across the Seine
at Asnières
1887
oil on canvas
52 x 65 cm
Bührle Foundation,
Zürich

56
Paul Signac
Boulevard de Clichy
1887
oil on canvas
46 x 65 cm
The Baltimore Museum of Art,
Gift of Frederick H. Gottlieb





57
Kitchen gardens
on Montmartre
1887
oil on canvas
96 x 120 cm
Stedelijk Museum,
Amsterdam

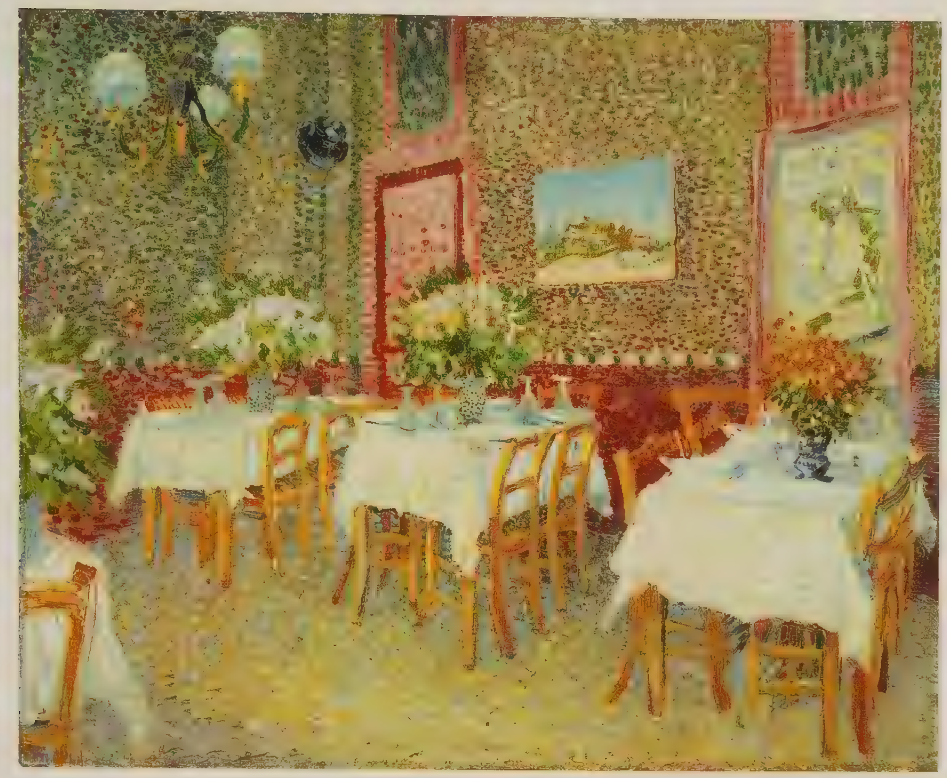


58
Allotments on Montmartre
1887
oil on canvas
81 x 100 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

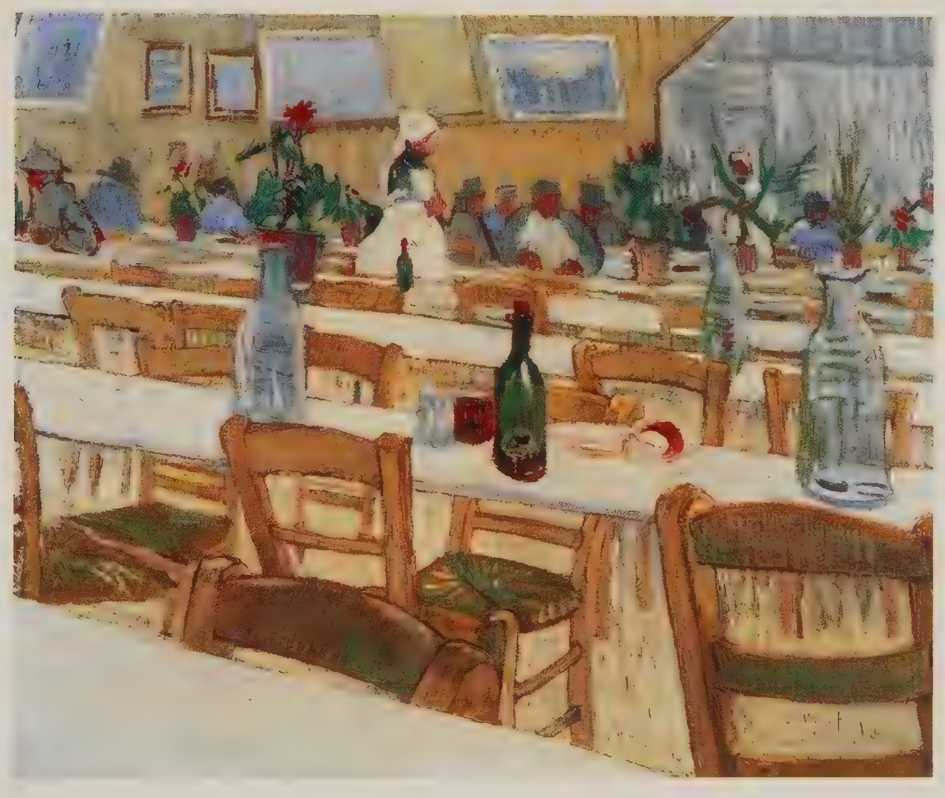
brow of the hill, windmills, which stand in for the area's bustling human activity. The two canvases are on a larger scale than any he had undertaken since *The potato eaters*, and he would subsequently judge them suitable examples with which to make his exhibition début in the spring of 1888 at the annual Salon des Indépendants.

AN INDEPENDENT PATH A series of Van Gogh's Paris paintings on a specific theme of modern city life, the restaurant or café interior, hints at the more active role he himself began to play in 1887. At one level, it was natural enough for him to wish to evoke the places where he took his meals and where many of the exchanges of ideas between artists took place; after all, in the wake of Edouard Manet (1832-1883), several Impressionist figure painters had portrayed such settings. But the specific restaurant interiors Van Gogh represented in different styles and at different times of the year all feature prominently displayed works of art on the walls; they may therefore have served the additional purpose of recording Van Gogh's activities as an exhibition organiser.

From his practical Dutch perspective, Van Gogh could see both the strengths and the pettinesses of the Paris world. Nothing infuriated him more than squabbles between the artists with whom he now identified, who were at root all committed to the same independent path. To combat this and galvanise his new peers, he tried to establish a cooperative social network. As well as instigating the practice of exchanging works of art, Van Gogh also organised two exhibitions in the informal atmosphere of popular eateries.

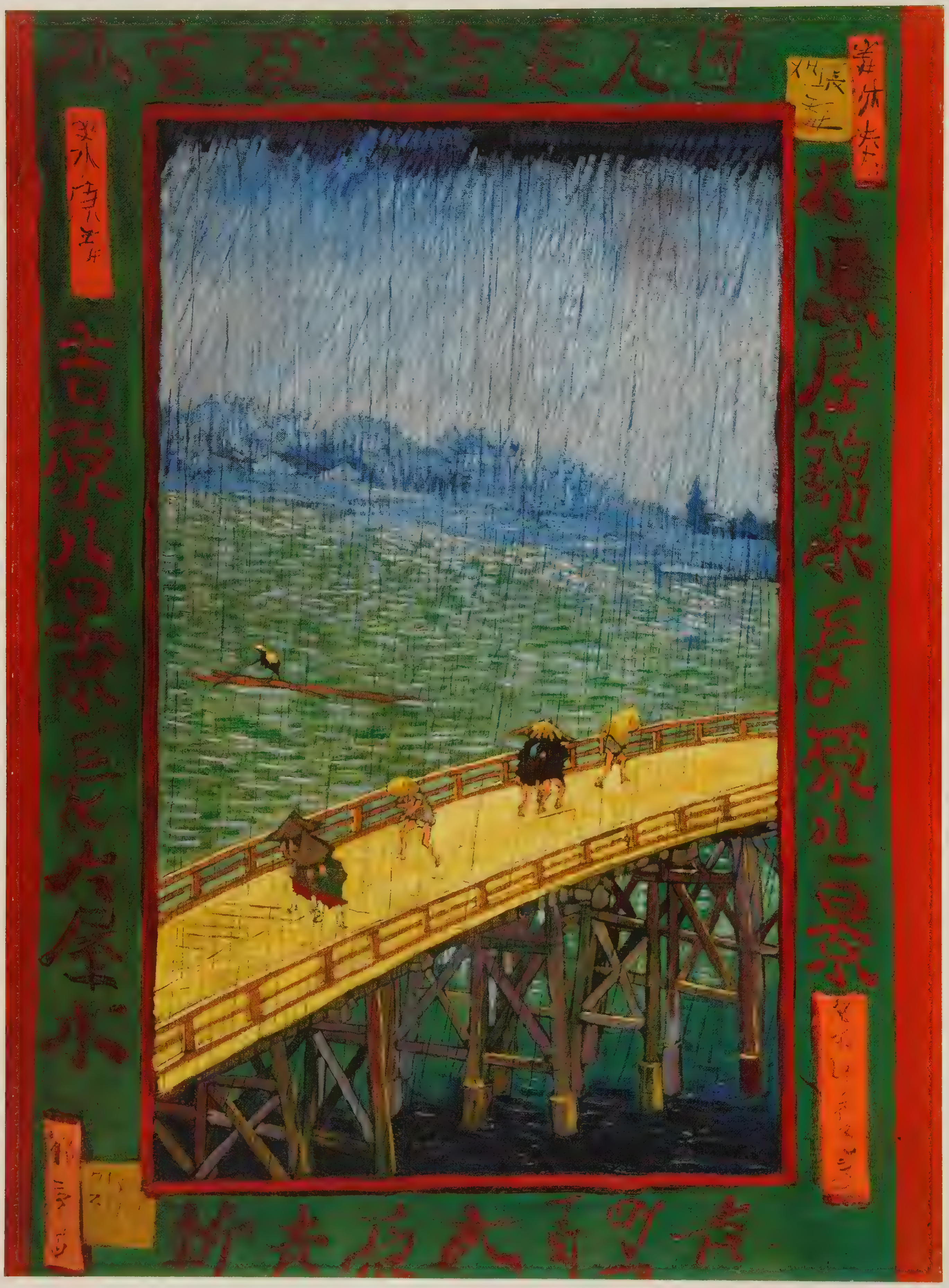


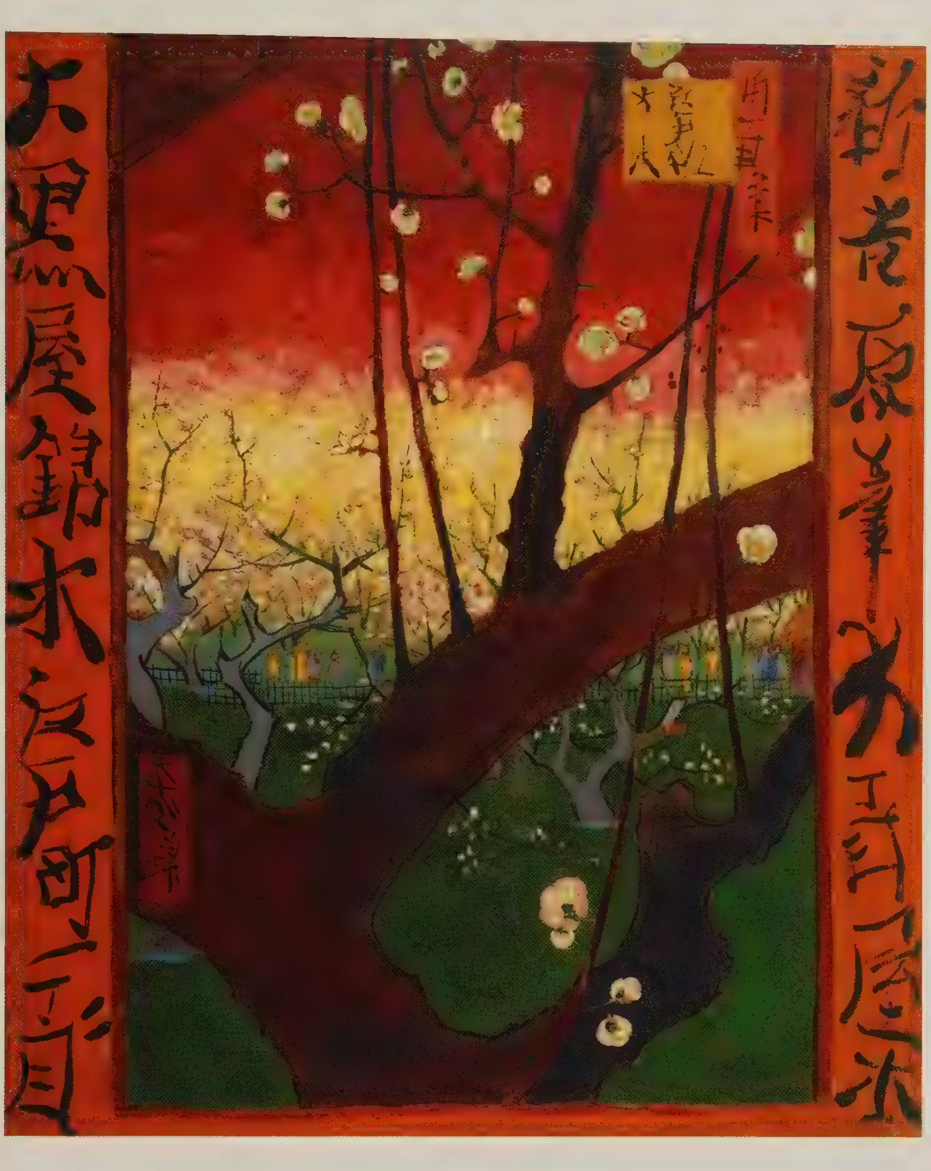
59
Interior of a restaurant
1887
oil on canvas
45 x 56 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo



60
Interior of a restaurant
1887
oil on canvas
54 x 64 cm
Private collection

In March and April 1887 he mounted a display of the Japanese prints he had been assiduously collecting (ill. 69), and in November he organised an informal exhibition of his own recent paintings and works by his new friends. These proactive initiatives constituted a concerted effort to intervene on behalf of the 'artists of the petit boulevard'. This was Van Gogh's





61
Bridge in the rain
(after Hiroshige)
1887
oil on canvas
73 x 54 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

62
The flowering plum tree
(after Hiroshige)
1887
oil on canvas
55 x 46 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

own newly coined designation for the younger generation of artists who were struggling to establish themselves and find dealers and buyers. These artists of the 'post'-Impressionist generation were decidedly disunited in style, although united by geography, as they tended to have their studios near the outer boulevards of Paris.

In *Interior of a restaurant* (ill. 59), the delicate *pointillé* handling and the pink, green and white colouring seem appropriate to this ordered, demure setting – possibly a riverside restaurant in Asnières – with its clean white tablecloths and ample bunches of spring flowers. Although the picture is not apparently a record of an exhibition, one of Van Gogh's recent *pointillé* paintings showing the Voyer d'Argenson Park hangs on the wall. A flatter application of colour and a more graphic use of outlines characterises another *Interior of a restaurant* painted later in the year (ill. 60), which until relatively recently was thought to date from his time in Arles. The long marble-topped communal tables and simple wooden rush-seated chairs establish a strong geometric framework for the composition, while all the human activity is concentrated along the far wall under the row of pictures. The predominant tonality of these is blue, in contrast to the yellows of the chairs and wall. Does this painting record Van Gogh's second informal exhibition held in November at the Grand Bouillon-Restaurant du Châlet in the avenue de Clichy?

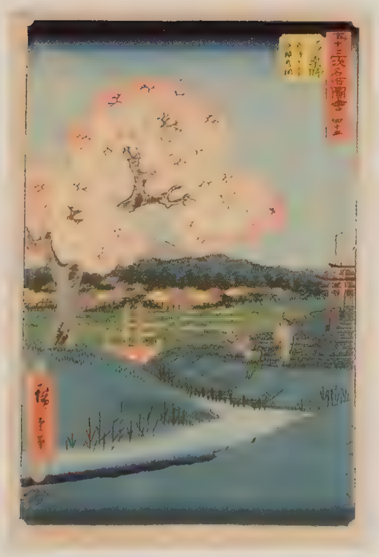
JAPAN Oddly enough, it was not the example of his French peers that prompted Van Gogh to make the most radical stylistic departures from his earlier Dutch work; it was the decision to confront Japanese art directly in his own work. In Paris Van Gogh was able to amplify his collection of prints, regularly scouring the shops that specialised in oriental wares, such as Siegfried Bing's emporium in the rue de Provence. Although Van Gogh was by no means the first Western artist to find Japanese art inspiring – Monet (1840-1926), Degas (1834-1917) and Whistler (1834-1903) had all introduced aspects of Japanese art into their work in the 1860s and 1870s – his wish to share that enthusiasm with others was a key factor in prompting the reassessment of Japonisme by the avant garde in the late 1880s.

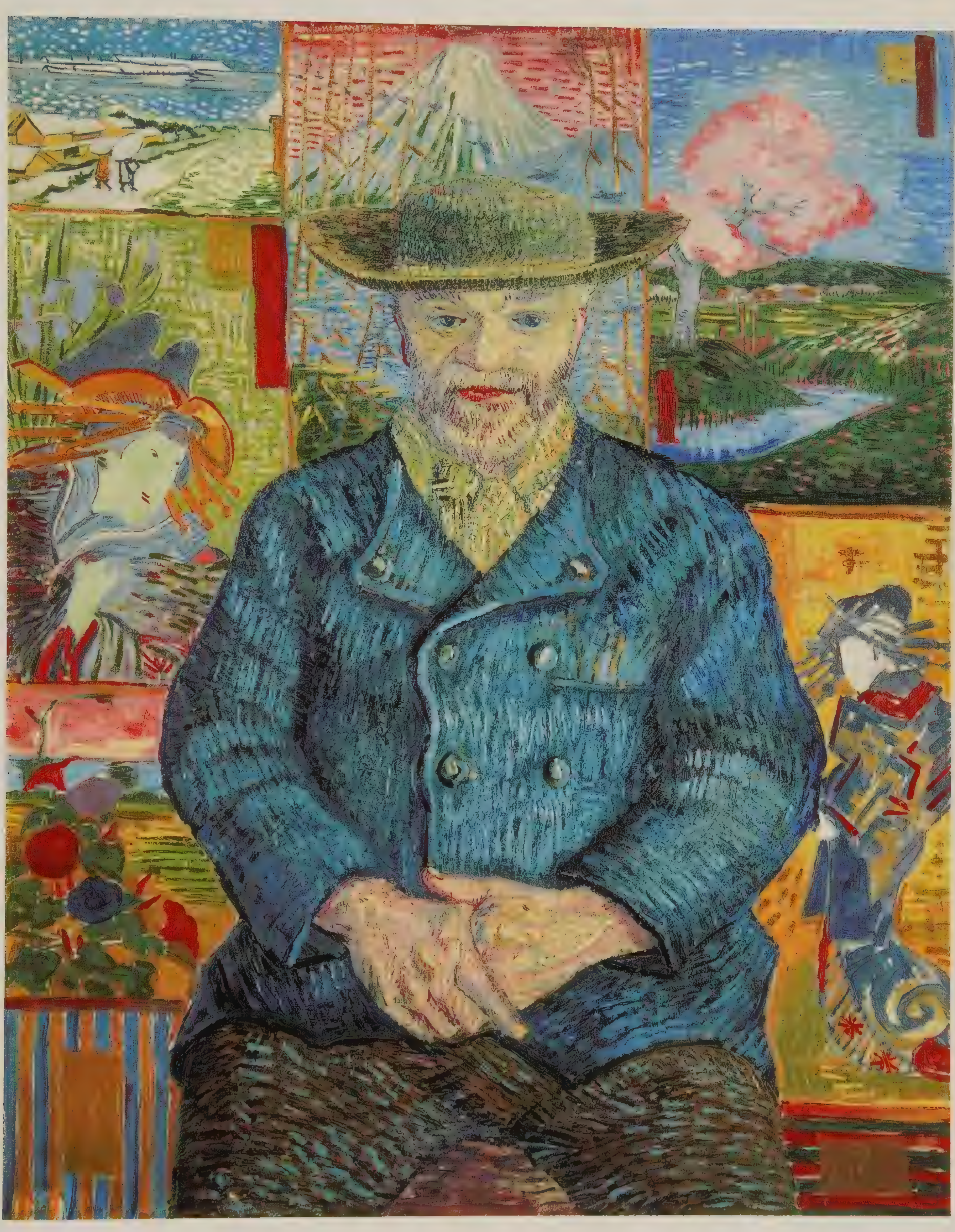
A certain Japanese tendency had been creeping steadily into Van Gogh's Parisian watercolours, several of which adopt somewhat oriental solutions to perspective. He was also fascinated by the amusing treatment of bustling human activity in Japanese prints. During the autumn of 1887 he set himself the new challenge of making painted copies of three prints from his collection. He was not striving for an exact copy but wanted to translate the effects of two-dimensional graphic work into the more tactile medium of oil paint. He selected two decorative landscape views by Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858), including his famous view of a bridge in the rain (ill. 61), as well as a full-length figure of an actress by Keisai Eisen (1790-1848), which he copied from the cover of a Japanese issue of the journal *Paris illustré*. It was the simplicity of Japanese design – the way objects in space were separated clearly within firm outlines – that seems to have interested him. In the process of copying *The flowering plum tree* (ill. 62), Van Gogh considerably exaggerated the background colour harmony of red sky, white blossom and green ground, producing flag-like horizontal bands. He was able to draw lessons about colour from this exercise: he saw that the Japanese printmakers kept their tones clear and in unified blocks and did not weaken their colour effects by searching after palpating atmospheres. From this date on Van Gogh would often adopt a similar procedure.

Van Gogh's portrait of the colour merchant Julien Tanguy (1824-1894), a loyal supporter of the artists of 'le petit boulevard', belongs within this phase of intense personal identification with Japanese art (ill. 64). Against a complicated and colourful background of Japanese prints – including a Hiroshige landscape at the right (ill. 63) above the Eisen courtesan – the

63
Utagawa Hiroshige
Ishiyakushi: The Yoshitsune cherry tree near the Noriyori shrine
1855
colour print
36 x 23 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

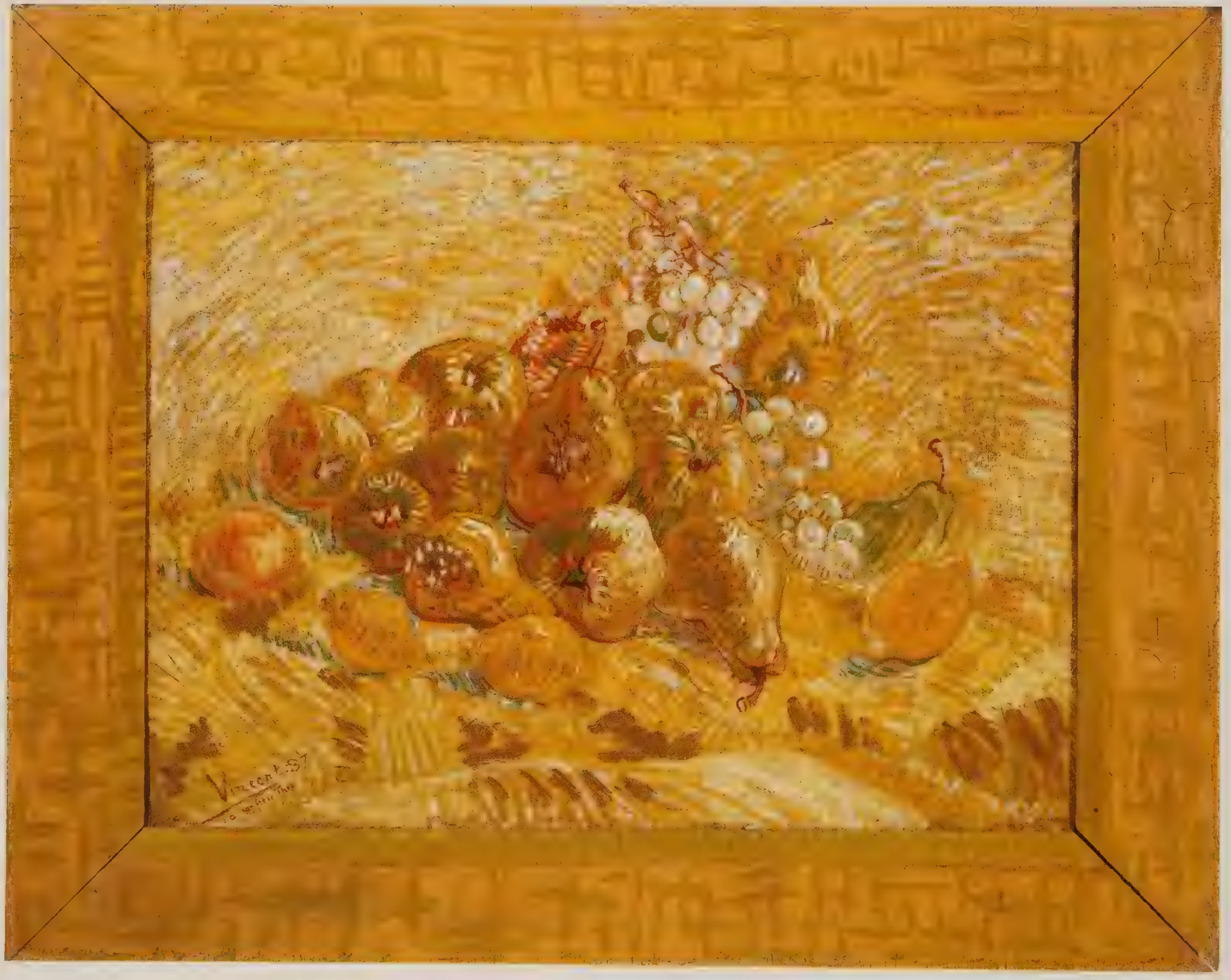
64
Portrait of Père Tanguy
1887
oil on canvas
92 x 75 cm
Musée Rodin,
Paris



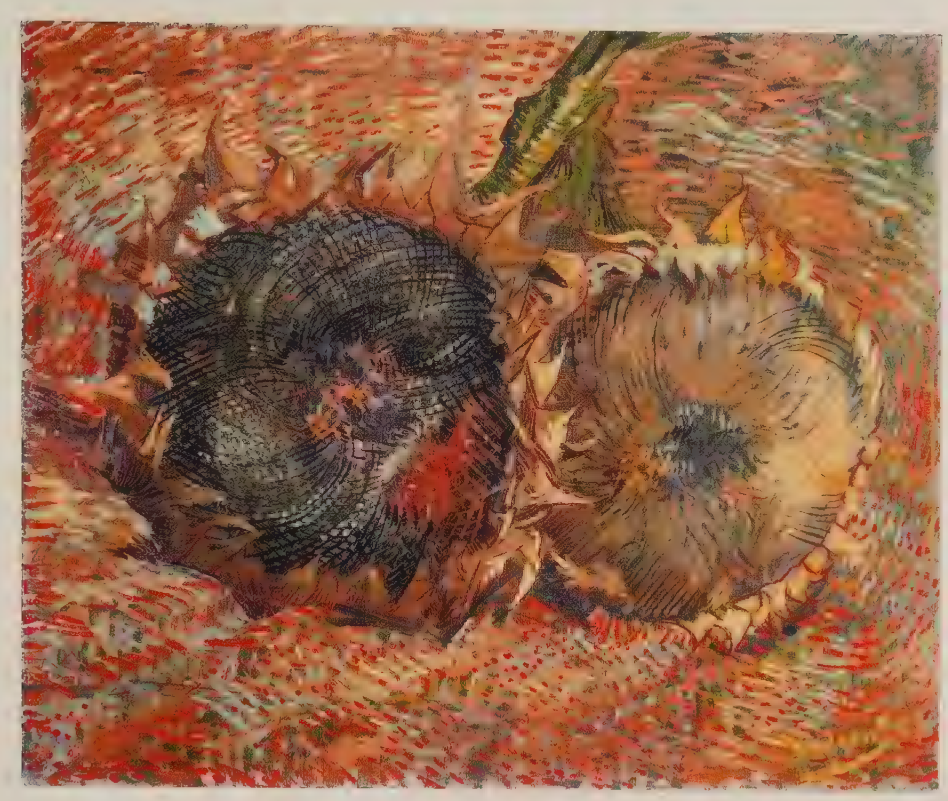


four-square figure of Tanguy has an almost Buddha-like passivity. Indeed, although it perhaps owes something to a recent tradition of similarly iconic portraiture – such as Manet's *Portrait of Zola* or Camille Pissarro's *Portrait of Cézanne* – the choice of emblematic images in this painting relates far more obviously to Van Gogh's own interests than to those of his sitter.

Japanese art was a key factor in the emergence of cloisonism, an innovative style developed in tandem by two of Van Gogh's friends from Cormon's studio, Louis Anquetin (1861-1932) and Emile Bernard. The blossoming of this style in early 1888 was a development in which Van Gogh took a keen personal interest, as well as a certain pride. But while he applauded the daring colouristic simplification of Anquetin's *The mower at noon* (ill. 90), for instance, or Bernard's *Earthenware pot and apples* (ill. 67), canvases he would



65
Still life
with quinces and lemons
1887
oil on canvas
48 x 65 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

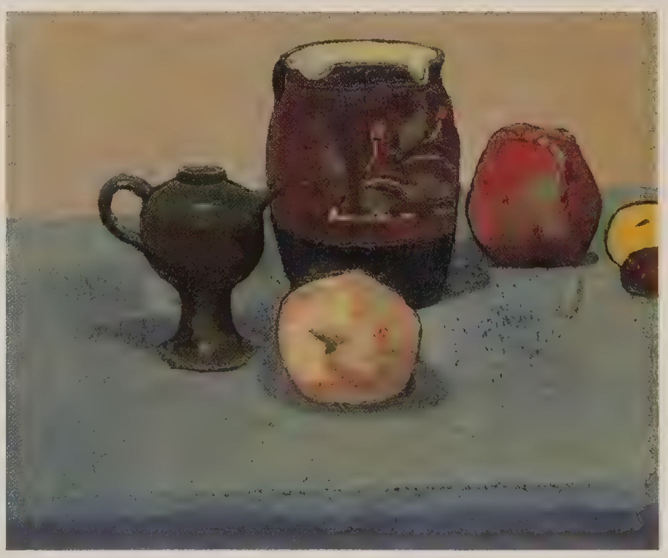


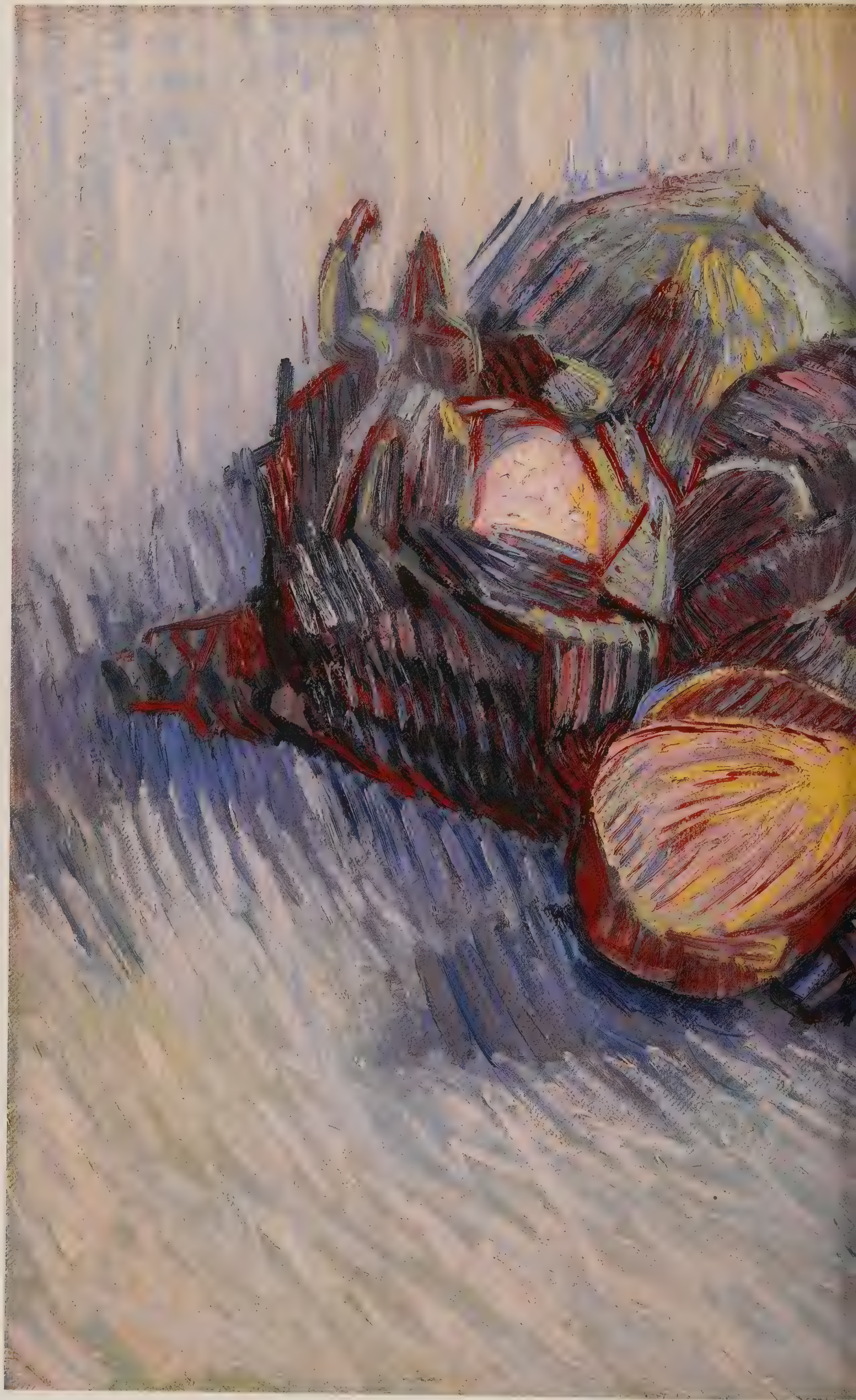
66
Still life: sunflowers
(exchanged with Gauguin)
1887
oil on canvas
50 x 60 cm
Kunstmuseum, Bern,
Hahnloser Collection

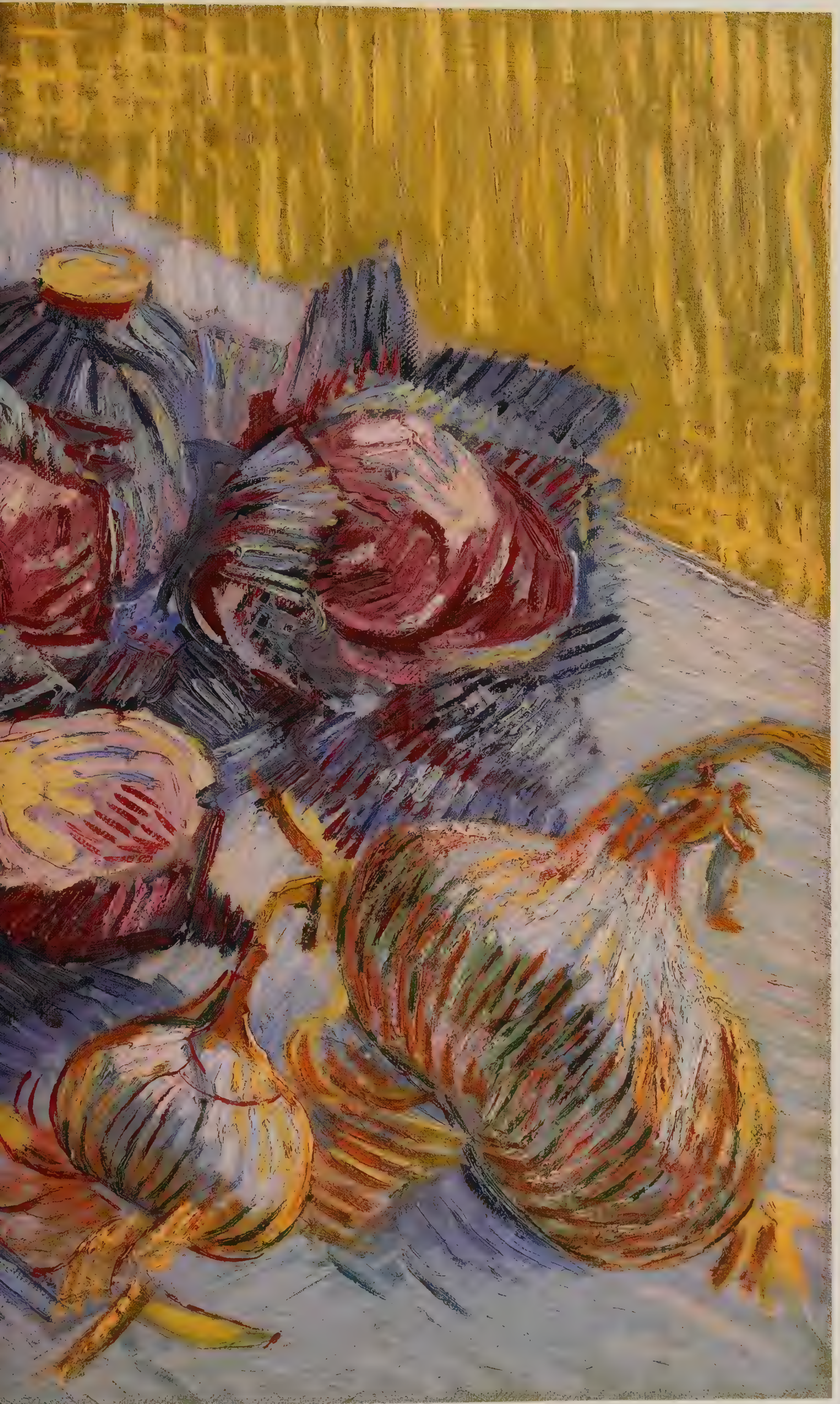
67
Emile Bernard
Earthenware pot and apples
1887
oil on canvas
46 x 55 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

have been happy to have painted himself, he would not go along with cloisonism's latent tendency towards abstraction and symbolism.

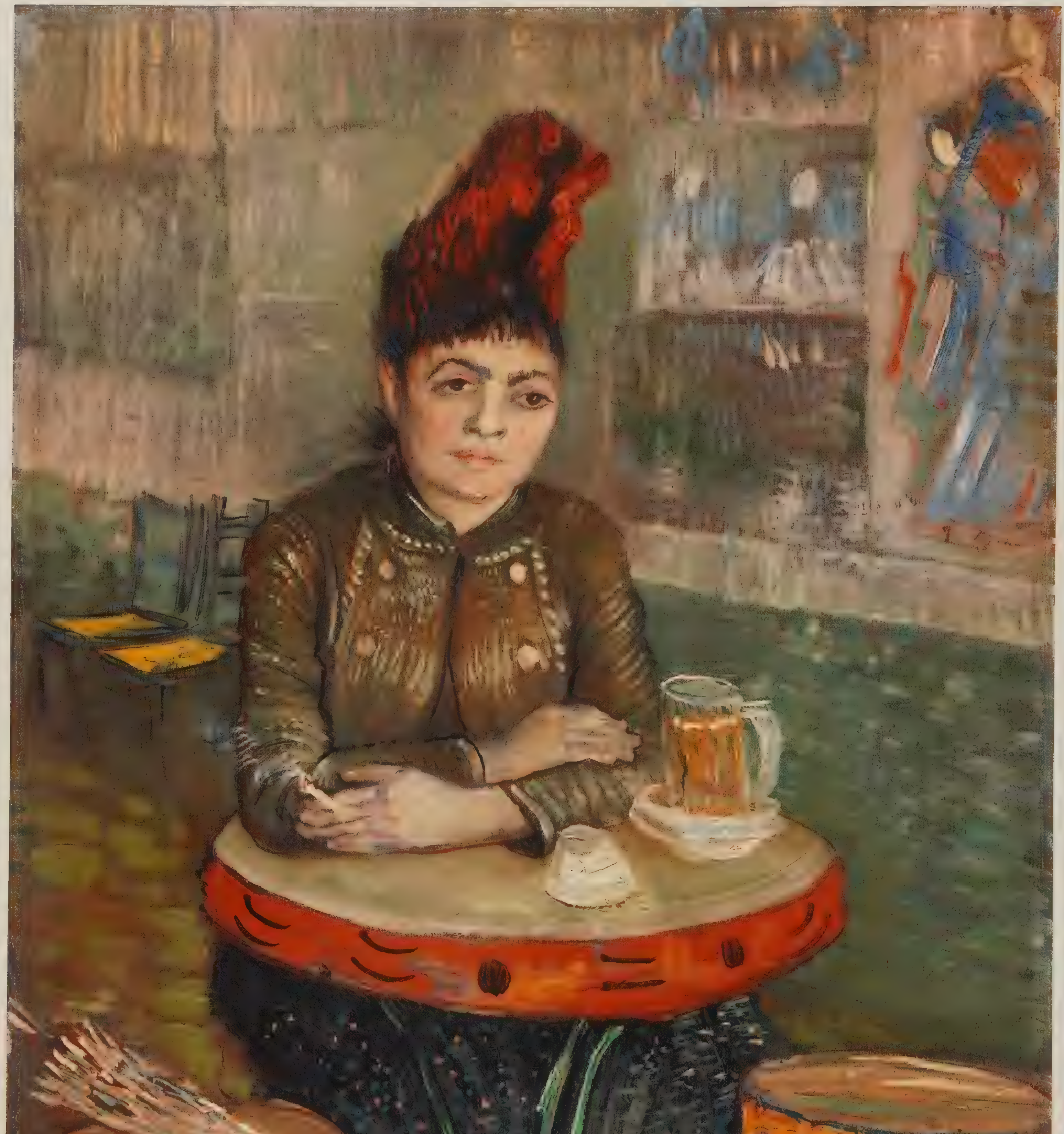
STILL LIFE AND PORTRAITURE Alongside the attempts that Van Gogh made to engage with specifically Parisian subject matter, in a number of his Paris paintings he seemed deliberately to turn back to familiar themes from Holland, as though to monitor his own stylistic evolution. An example is *Still life with cabbages and onions* (ill. 68), painted crisply in bright complementary striations of purples, pinks and greens instead of the solid earth tones he had used earlier. In most of his still lifes he was preoccupied by colour complementaries, but *Still life with quinces and lemons* (ill. 65) marks an important colouristic discovery with its variants of a single hue, yellow: a number of different fruits are set against a yellow background, and this tone even carries over into the decorative frame. Yet although the palette is more modern, this too is a reversion to the experiments in near monochrome he had made in his Dutch still lifes. The remarkable group of paintings of sunflowers (ill. 66) is reminiscent of the earlier still lifes of birds' nests, for rather than presenting the blooms in a vase, Van Gogh shows them drying out on a flat surface, past their best as flowers but





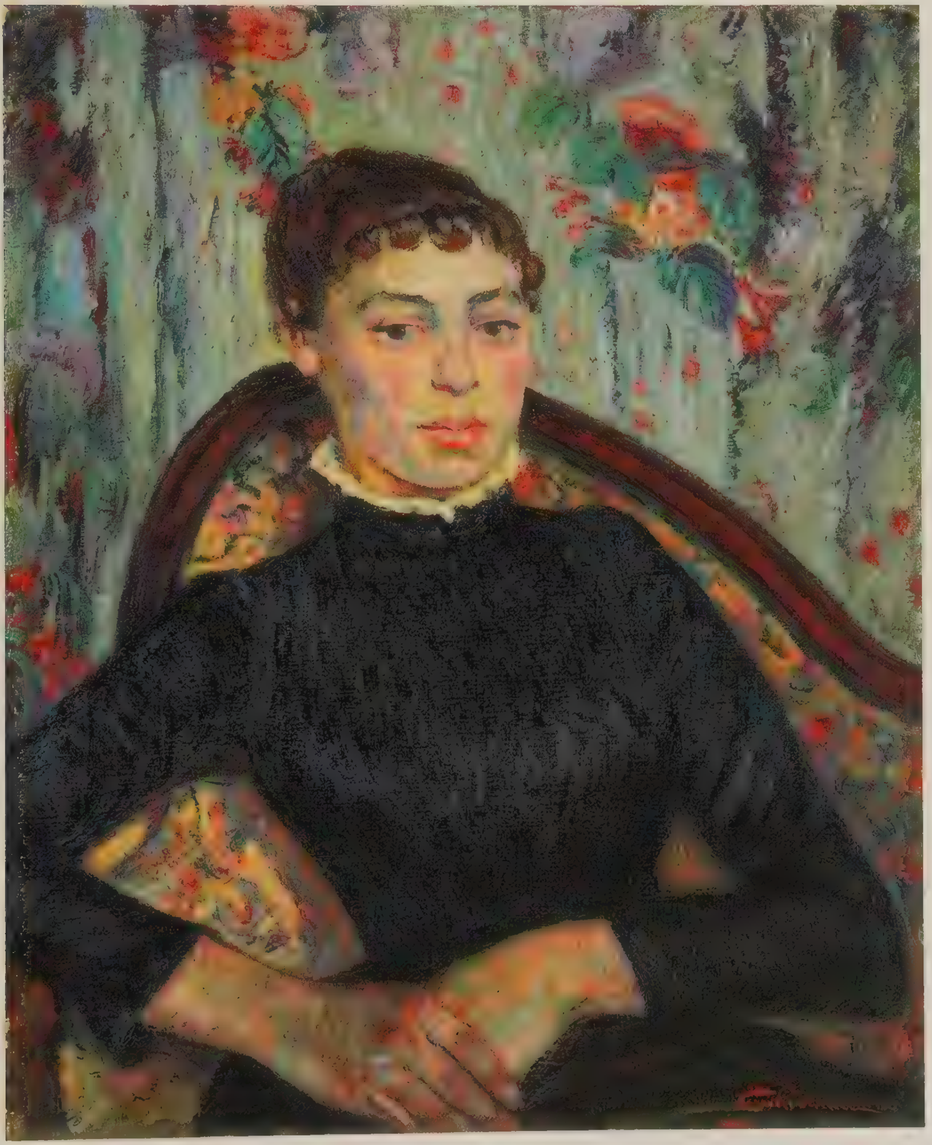


68
Still life
with cabbages and onions
1887
oil on canvas
50 x 65 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



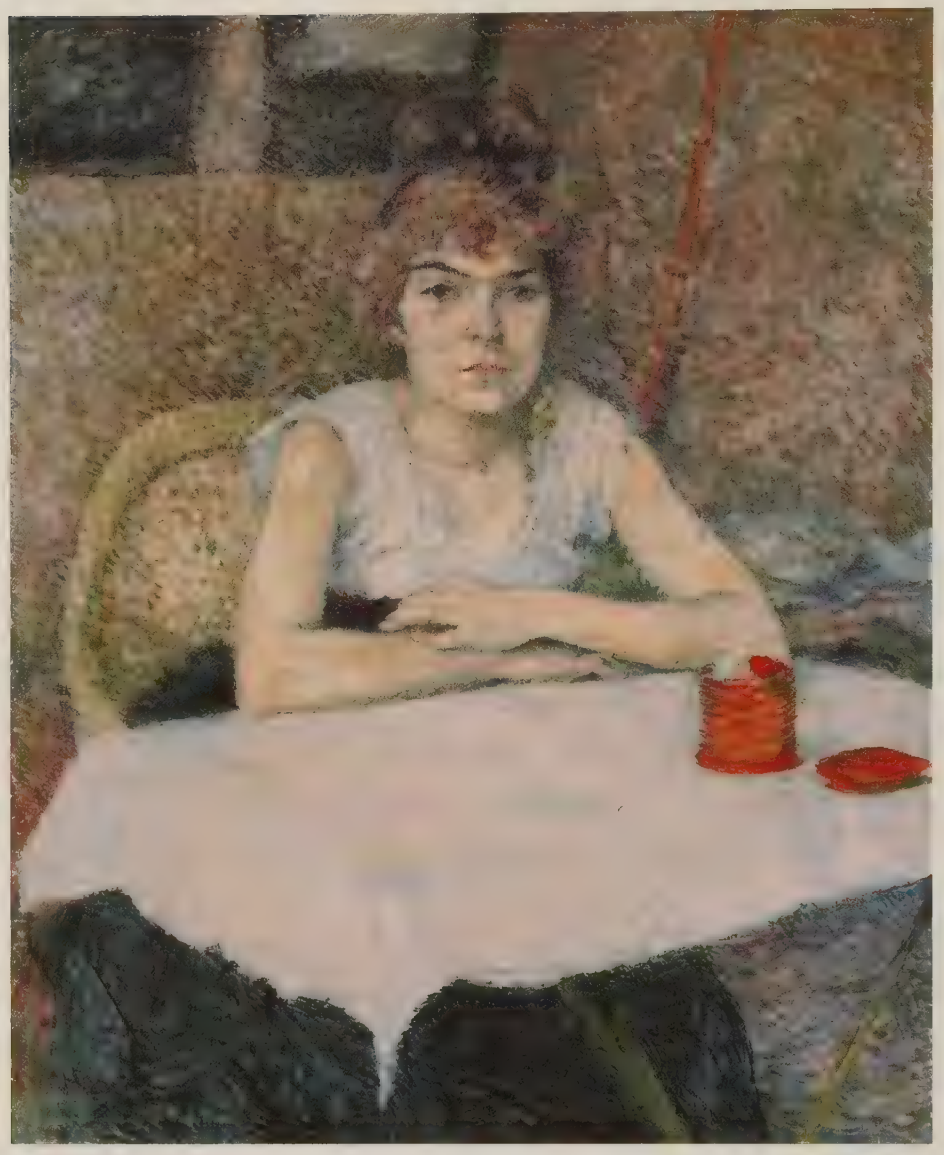
interesting from a draughtsman's point of view. This group, which led to an exchange of pictures with Gauguin, heralds a theme that Van Gogh would famously continue in the south of France.

The new importance given to portraiture is one of the key indicators of the changes that occurred during Van Gogh's time in Paris. He was proud of Dutch achievements in this genre and fervently hoped to continue the tradition of Rembrandt and Frans Hals. But he was also keen to learn from French examples. Van Gogh was struck by Armand Guillaumin's (1841-1927) *Portrait of a young woman* (ill. 70), first seen at the 1886 Impressionist exhibition, and he persuaded Theo to buy it. With its bold colour contrasts and stylish combination of floral wallpaper, upholstered chair, close-fitting bodice and up-to-the-minute hairstyle, the work looked arrestingly modern. Following Guillaumin's example, Van Gogh made a few attempts to portray his sitters in appropriate surroundings. He painted a self-consciously modern genre portrait featuring the proprietress of the café du Tambourin,



69
Agostina Segatori
in the café du Tambourin
1887
oil on canvas
55 x 46 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

70
Armand Guillaumin
Portrait of a young woman
1886
oil on canvas
65 x 54 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

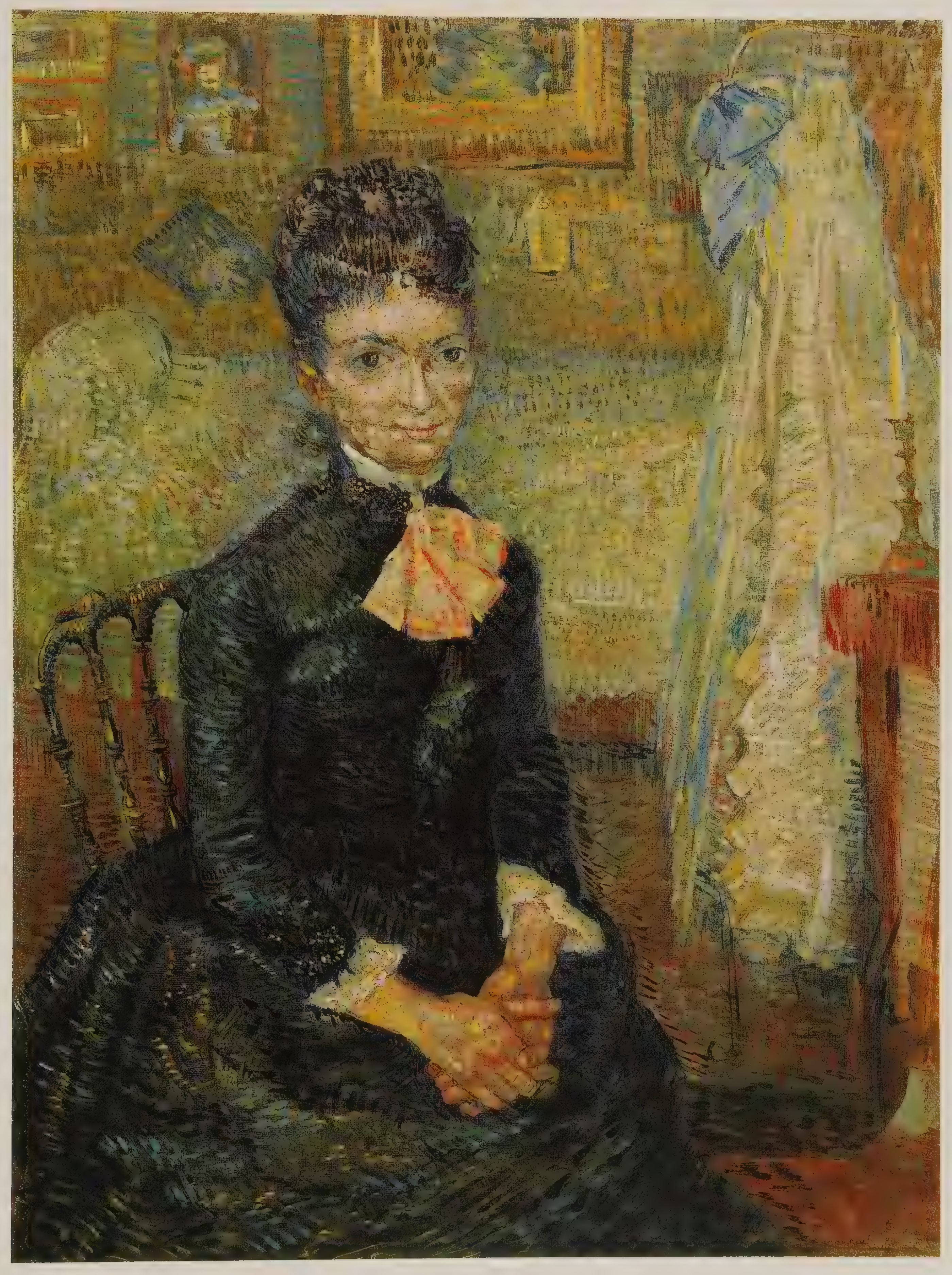


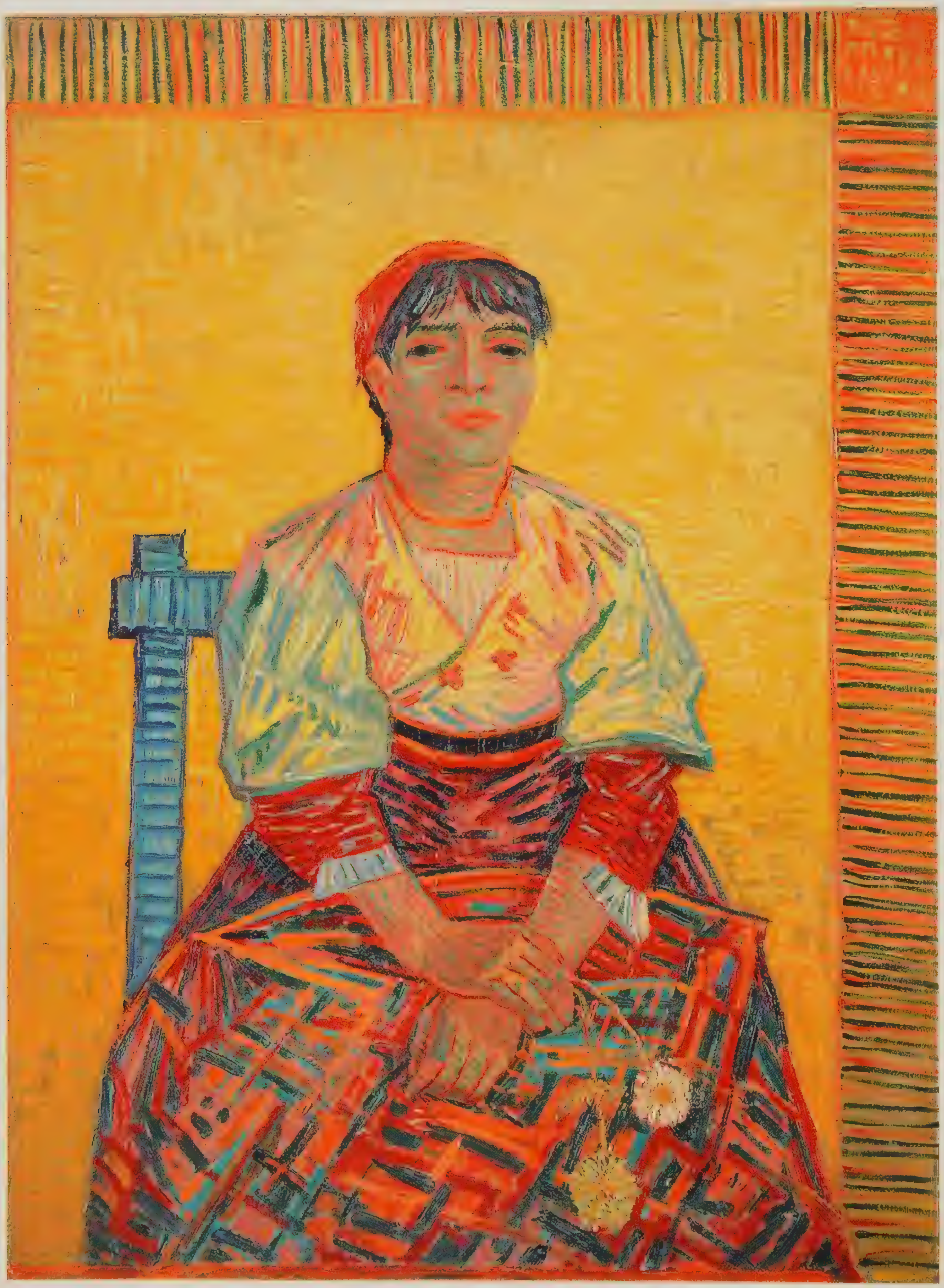
71
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec
Young woman at a table
(Poudre de Riz)
1887
oil on cardboard
65 x 58 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

72
Mother by a cradle:
portrait of
Léonie Rose Davy-Charbuy
1887
oil on canvas
61 x 45 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

Agostina Segatori, with whom he had established some sort of liaison (ill. 69). He shows her seated, cigarette in hand, at one of the tambourine-shaped tables that gave the establishment its name. The model has a somewhat lost, faraway look, and her pale complexion speaks of the unhealthy atmosphere and artifice of city life. At the same time, the painting is a study of the setting for his exhibition of Japanese prints: on the walls one glimpses a display of coloured images, including, to the right, a full-length Japanese actor print. The folded Japanese parasol on the stool serves to link foreground and background.

This painting brought Van Gogh into line with the ambitions of another talented friend from Cormon's, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), whose remarkable career painting lowlife characters in their habitual urban settings was just getting under way at this time. The loosely impressionistic style and the aqueous turquoise colour scheme, offset by touches of red, is similar to a number of Lautrec's café scenes, such as *Poudre de Riz* (ill. 71).





Indeed, like many of Lautrec's models, La Segatori, a former artist's model, was a worldly and jaded character. Somewhat different in mood is Van Gogh's *Mother by a cradle* (ill. 72), which portrays the niece of the dealer Portier. This work is again similar to a certain tender strand within Lautrec's work or to the delicate, muted interiors of Berthe Morisot (1841-1895). Painted in short broken touches and with a predominantly blue harmony, it depicts a distinctly bourgeois setting and in this respect stands almost alone in Van Gogh's oeuvre. In a letter to his sister Wil, the artist drew attention to the role played within Impressionism by talented women painters; and just as he chose his words to suit his sister's interests and sensibilities, Van Gogh may have had in mind an imaginary female spectator for such a discreet and sensitive painting.

For the most part, however, Van Gogh opted henceforth in his portraits for uncompromisingly frontal poses, which isolate the model's head and shoulders against the simplest of coloured backdrops. It would be hard to contrive a starker contrast of stylistic approach than that between his portrait of La Segatori and *The Italian woman with carnations* (ill. 73), both painted in 1887. In the latter, all vestiges of naturalistic setting are abandoned. Few artists at the time would have dared use such a vulgar colour scheme as this stark yellow background – treated as a textural but two-dimensional space – and these garish red and green stripes for flesh tones, repeated in the decorative, asymmetric border. With this unprecedentedly brash style, which he would develop in Arles in a series of portraits of working people, Van Gogh effectively established new parameters for portraiture. He did not jettison the idea of likeness, but from now on he would primarily concern himself with expressive and decorative effects; in the process he would allow himself considerable leeway over choice of brushwork, setting and colour, all of which became steadily more exaggerated or abstracted from nature.

73
The Italian woman with carnations
1887
oil on canvas
81 x 60 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

1888

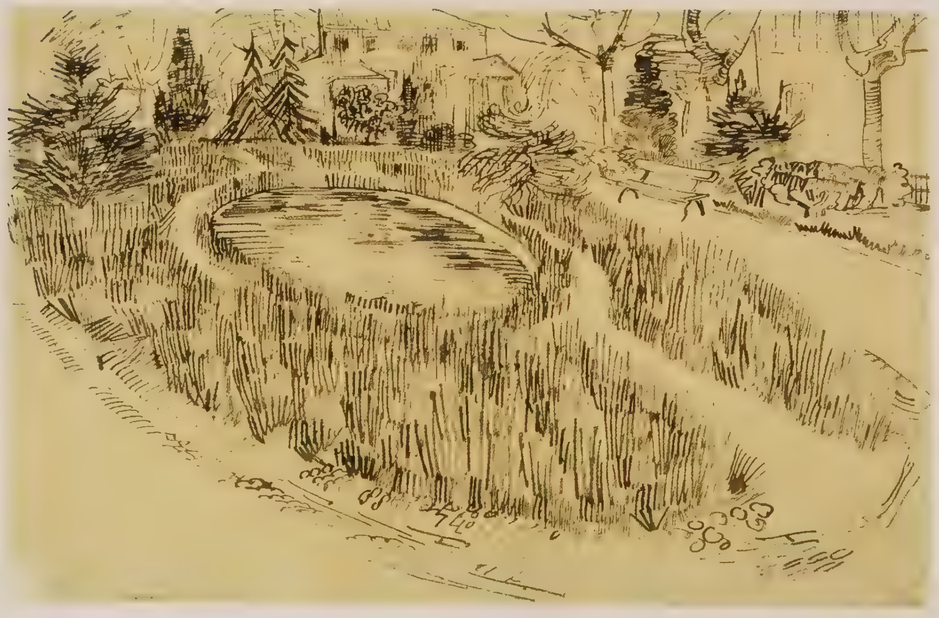
Arles

Finding the South

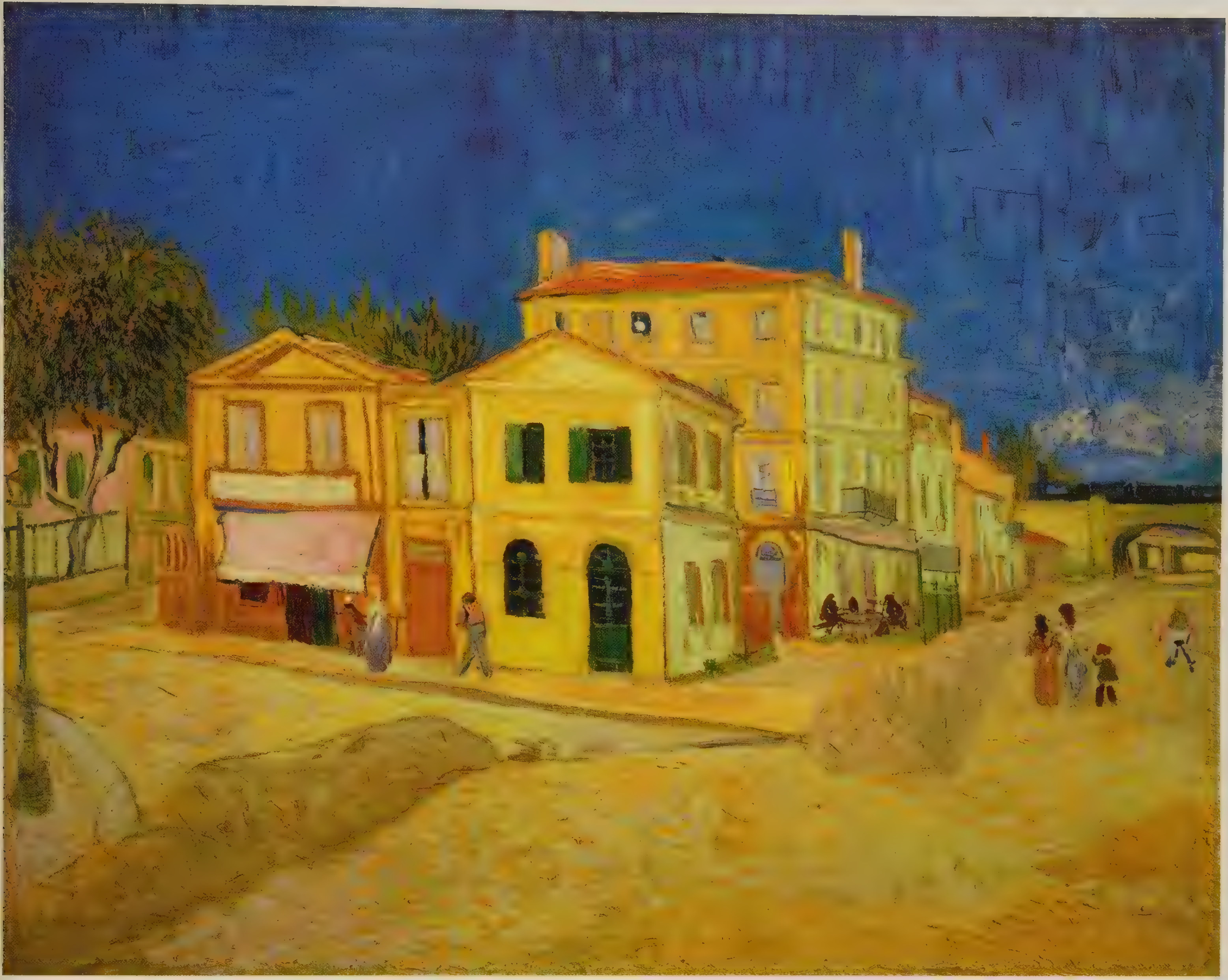
IN FEBRUARY 1888 VAN GOGH CARRIED OUT the plan he had hatched a year earlier and took the train south from Paris to Arles. The impulse to put behind him the bustle and distraction, expense, stress and cold of the city was real and urgent. However, his notion of what he would find in Provence was somewhat vague and illusory: it was a classic example of the northerner's yearning for the south. Van Gogh envisaged Provence primarily as a painter and in terms of colour: it was 'the land of the blue tones and gay colours' [572/459a]. He spoke of a desire to experience the colour and warmth of the true south as it had been expressed by Delacroix (in his north African paintings), and to find an equivalent of the gaiety he found in the landscapes of Japan. He was also drawn to the larger-than-life picture of the Midi conjured by the tales of Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897).

Van Gogh's Arles period, from February 1888 to May 1889, was highly productive: whilst there, he painted what many consider to be the most brilliant masterpieces of his career. If the tally of his total painted oeuvre currently stands at some 864 canvases, the sixteen-month period in Arles accounts for 187, testifying to the remarkable speed and facility he attained there. It is an interesting question to ask how far this body of work was primarily reactive, a response to the stimulus Arles itself provided – as Van Gogh's letters often imply – and how far it was the result of careful preparation and of his preordained plan to paint the south in brilliant colours. It is certainly true to say that in Arles Van Gogh at last discovered a way of imbuing his work with that passion he had spoken of in 1880, a passion that had been kept somewhat in check in recent months.

Arles, strategically located at the point where the Rhône disperses its waters into the Camargue delta, is flanked to the east and north by the flat agricultural plain of La Crau with the Alpilles range beyond. The fact that Arles itself had a somewhat castoff and charmless air, compared to the picturesque attractions of the Riviera that drew most painters to the south, counted in its favour in Van Gogh's eyes. Here was unworked terrain. He felt comfortable in this unpretentious provincial town. In 1888 little evidence remained of Arles's past glories as a Greek port, although there were vestiges of its time as chief Roman trading post on the Domitian Way. Its main claims to fame were its Roman arena, still used for bullfights, and the reputed beauty of the Arlésiennes (made famous by Mistral and Gounod, Daudet and Bizet) who still wore their characteristic shawls and black headdresses. The Rhône had its barge traffic, and the railway had brought industrialisation. There was a military barracks and a brothel to serve it. In other words, Arles, unlike artists' colonies in the north, had a working life of its



74
The pond in the park at Arles with the Yellow House in the background
1888
pencil, reed pen and brown ink
31.5 x 49.5 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam



own and was not dependent on tourism or visiting painters. Van Gogh often incorporated these signs of industry and modernity into his views of the town. At first he lived and took his meals in a hotel, but from September onwards he settled into his own rented space in the so-called Yellow House, which overlooked the Place Lamartine (ill. 74), wedged between railway and river on the north side of the town. He was to paint this house on two occasions (ill. 75), just as he had painted the vicarage at Nuenen and the view from his apartment in Paris. From here it was easy for him to reach the surrounding countryside on foot, and initially, for want of models, landscape and still life provided his main source of subject matter.

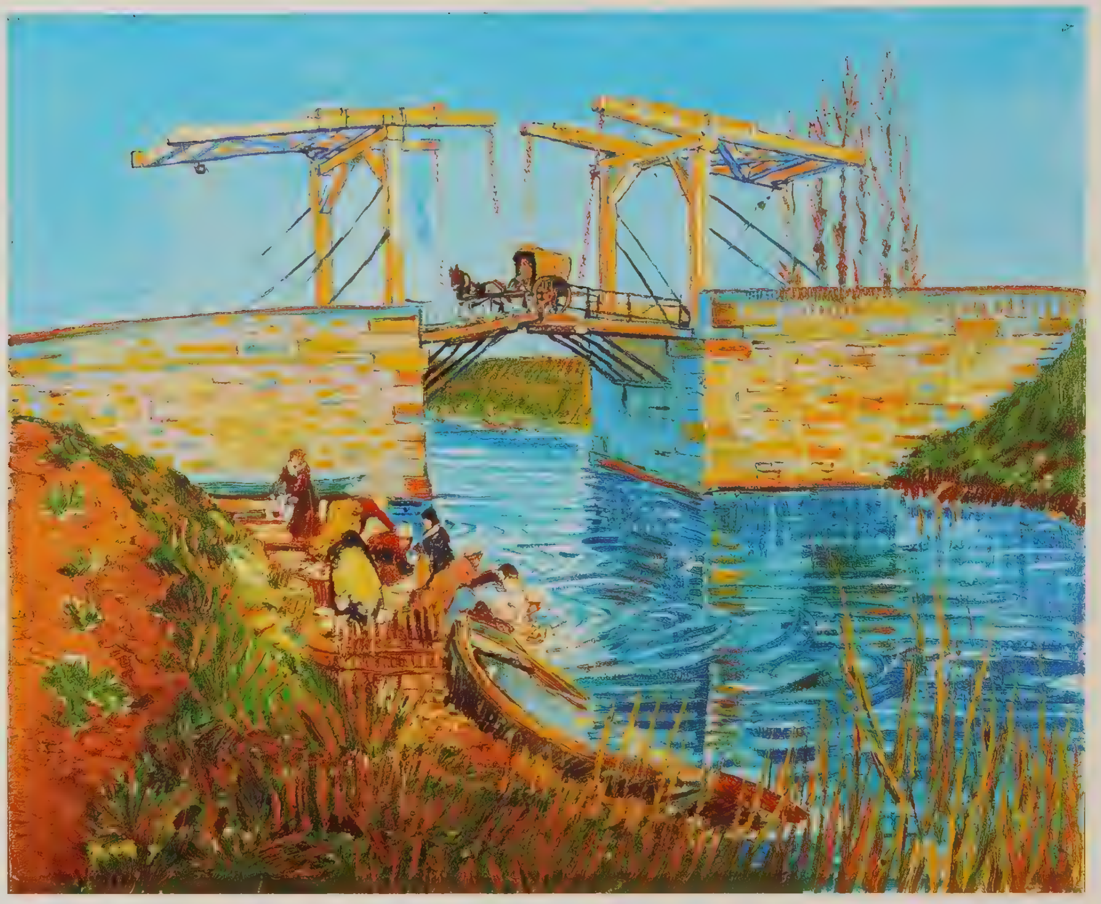
The style and the motifs of Van Gogh's earliest Arles canvases are similar to those of his recent work in Paris. But once an exceptionally cold spell abated, he began working out of doors under the Mediterranean sky. One

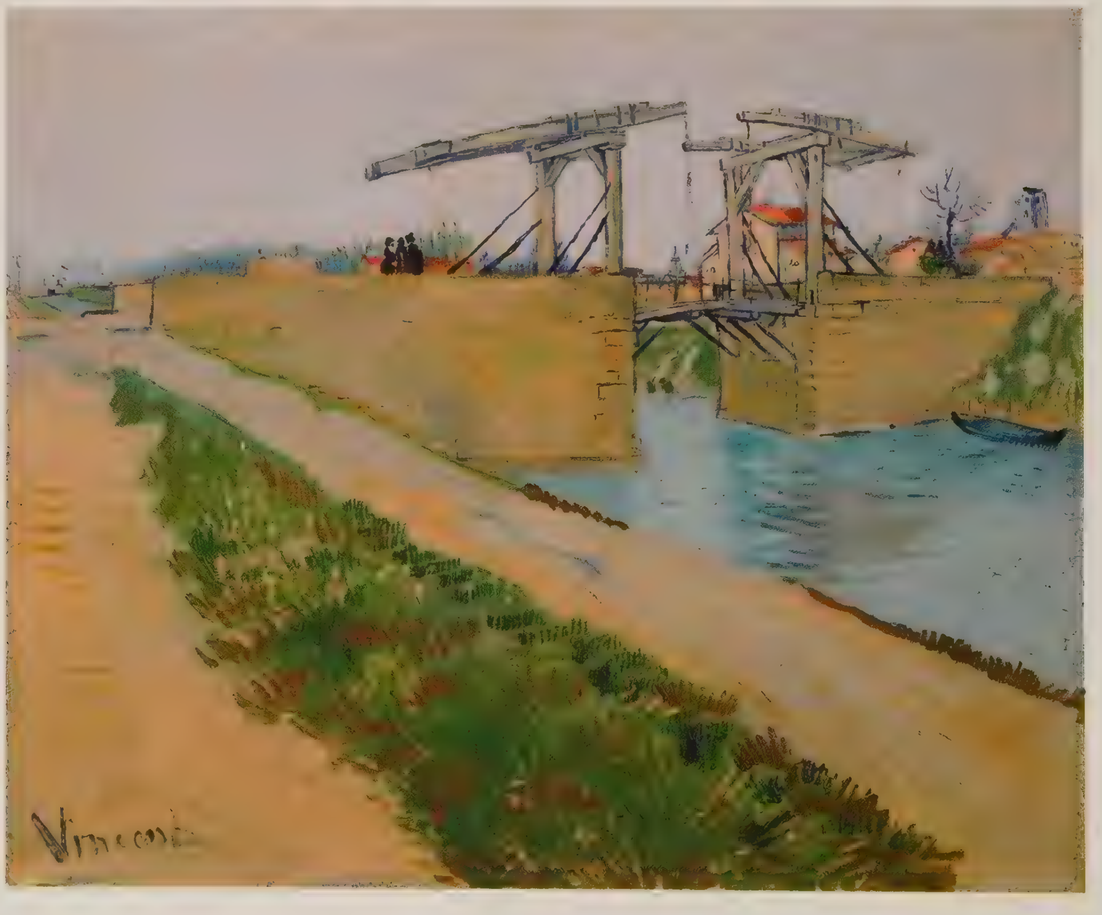
75
The Yellow House
(The street)
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

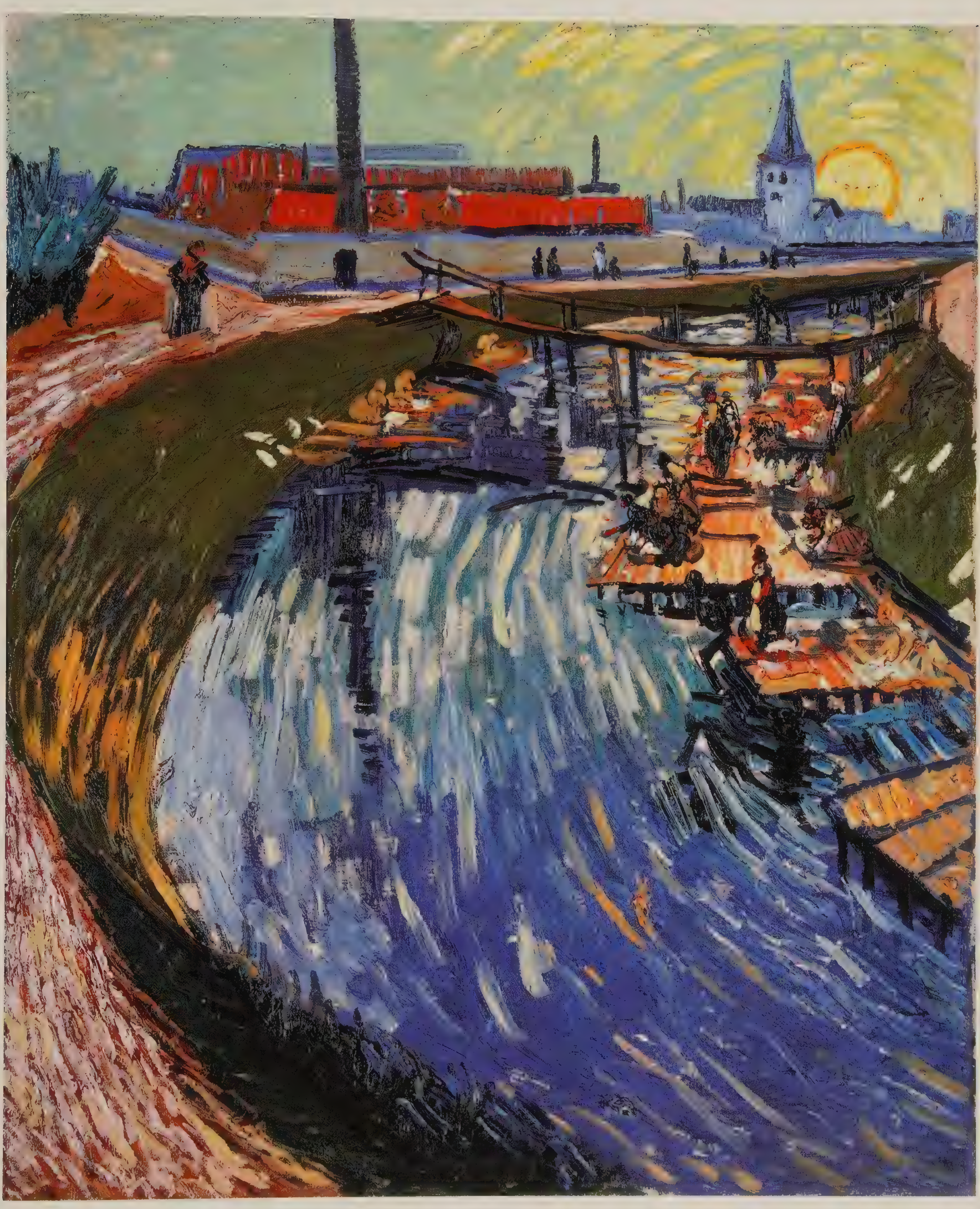
76
Bridge at Arles
(The Langlois Bridge)
1888
oil on canvas
54 x 65 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

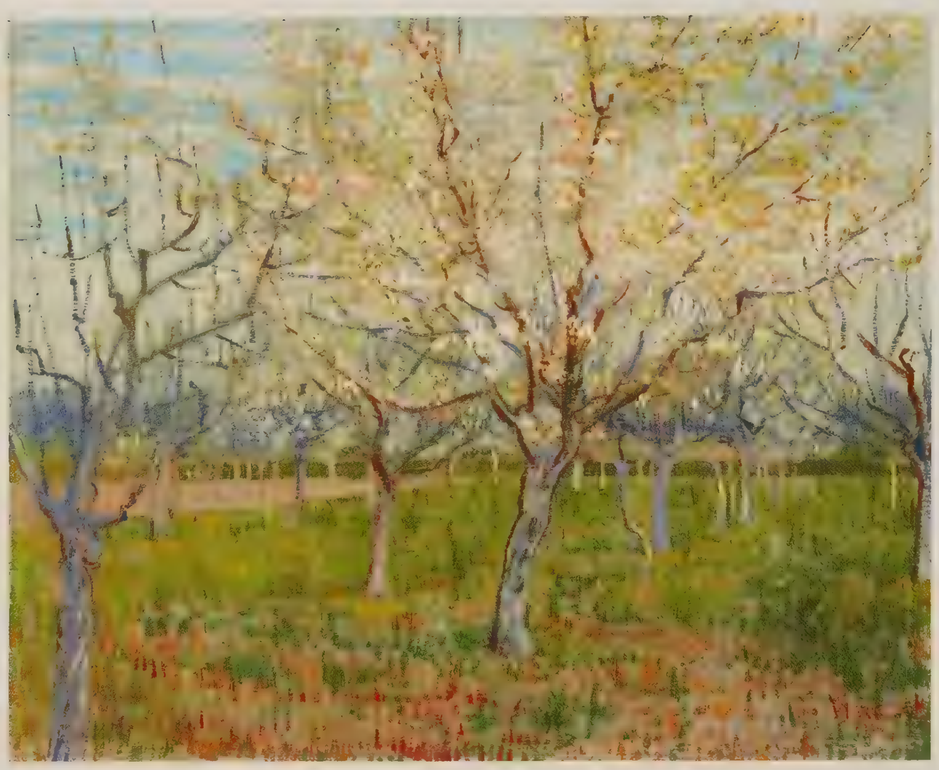
77
The Langlois bridge
1888
oil on canvas
58 x 73 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

78
La Roubine du Roi
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 61 cm
Private collection







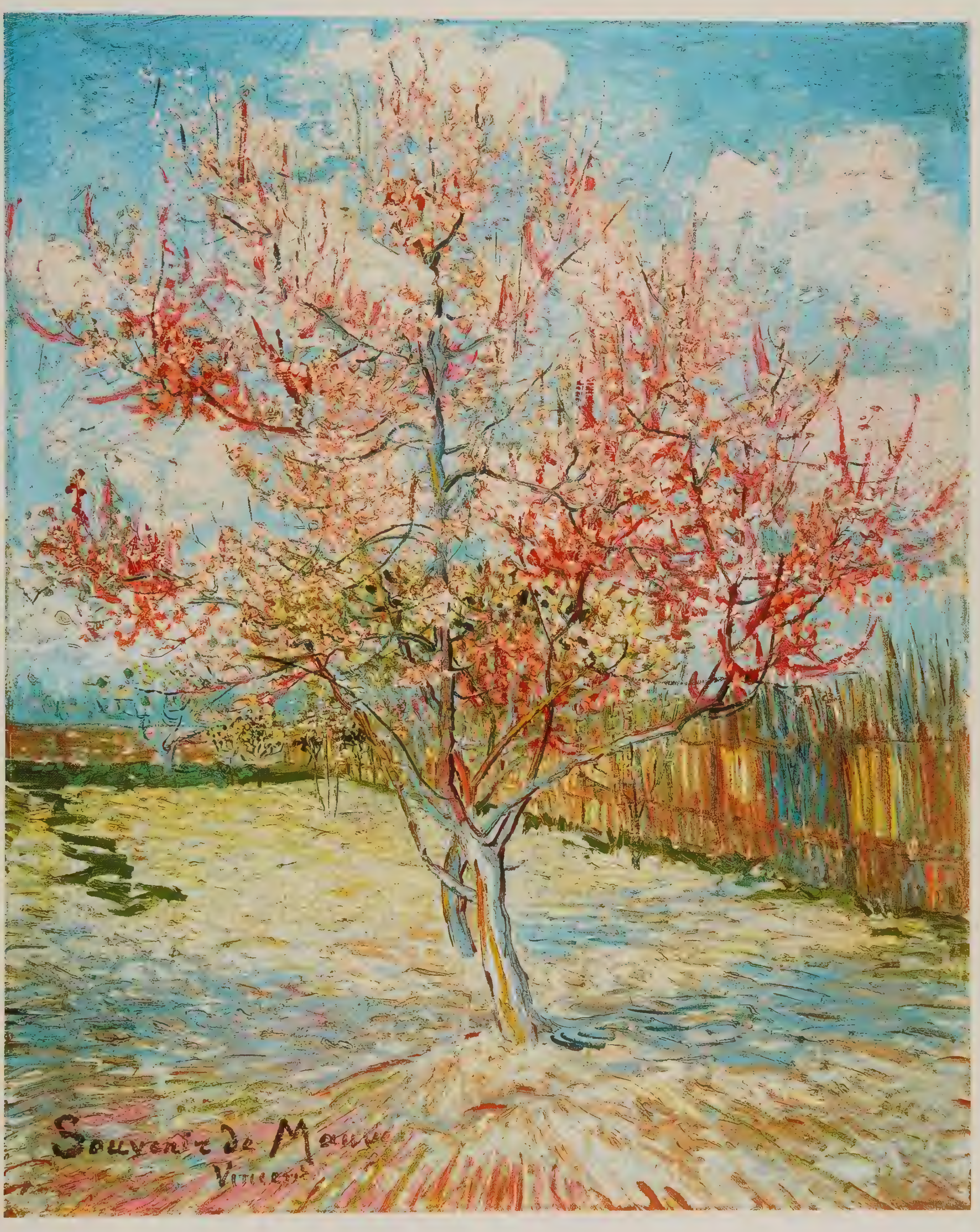


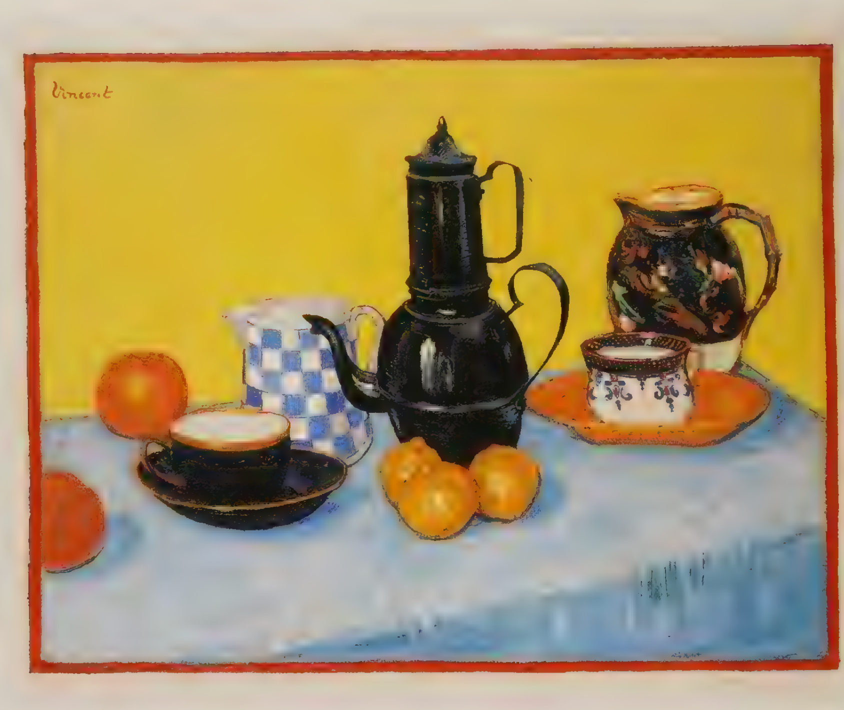
79
The pink orchard
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 80 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

80
Pink peach tree in blossom
(Souvenir de Mauve)
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 59 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

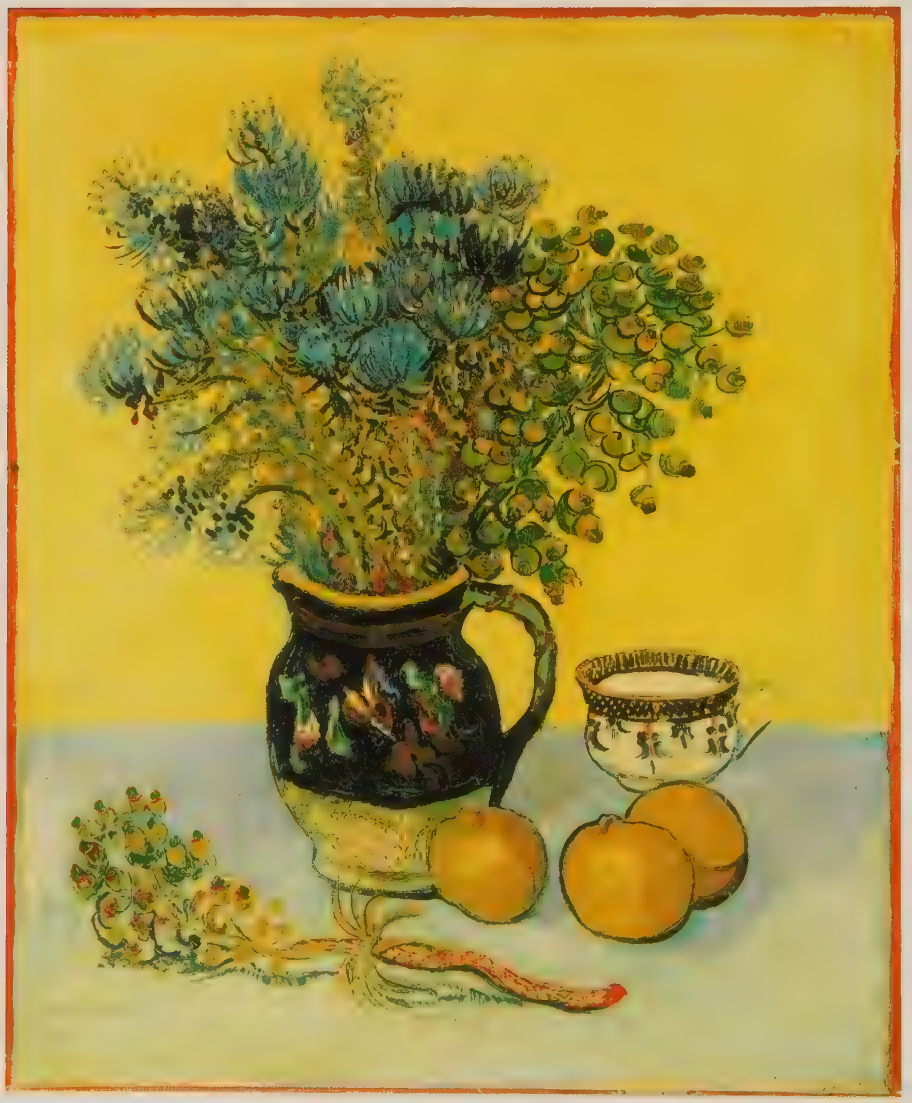
of his earliest studies was *The Langlois bridge* (ill. 76), a subject he initially tackled on a modest scale with the aid of his perspective frame. The painting is orchestrated around bright blue/yellow and green/orange contrasts, and this is the first canvas in which he dared to paint the southern sky, using intense turquoise blue applied in an unbroken flat block behind the intricate structure of the wooden drawbridge. A second view of the same bridge seen from the other side in grey weather creates a wholly different effect (ill. 77). He was embarking upon a campaign to record, season by season, the characteristic aspects of rural life in the Midi – much as he had done in Nuenen – and he constantly drew comparisons: Arles's irrigation canals and drawbridges were reminders of waterways in the Low Countries, but its orchards in blossom (almonds, pears and plums) were a direct reminder of Japanese prints, notably of the Hiroshige print he had so recently copied (ill. 62). The modest walled farms and their gardens delighted him with their cheerful aspect: 'here farms and low pubs are less dreary and less dramatic than in the North, since the warmth, etc., makes poverty less harsh and melancholy.' [661/519] He found himself fascinated by the overall character of the luminous light and the crisp, colourful patterns created by the spiky southern vegetation.

In *Pink peach tree in blossom* (ill. 80), one of a series of orchard subjects Van Gogh undertook between March and April, he used a mixture of touches: jagged and parallel strokes of alternating colour to indicate the ground and the reed fence, less emphatic overlapping marks of a single tone for the sky, and crisp pink dabs for the blossom. Although

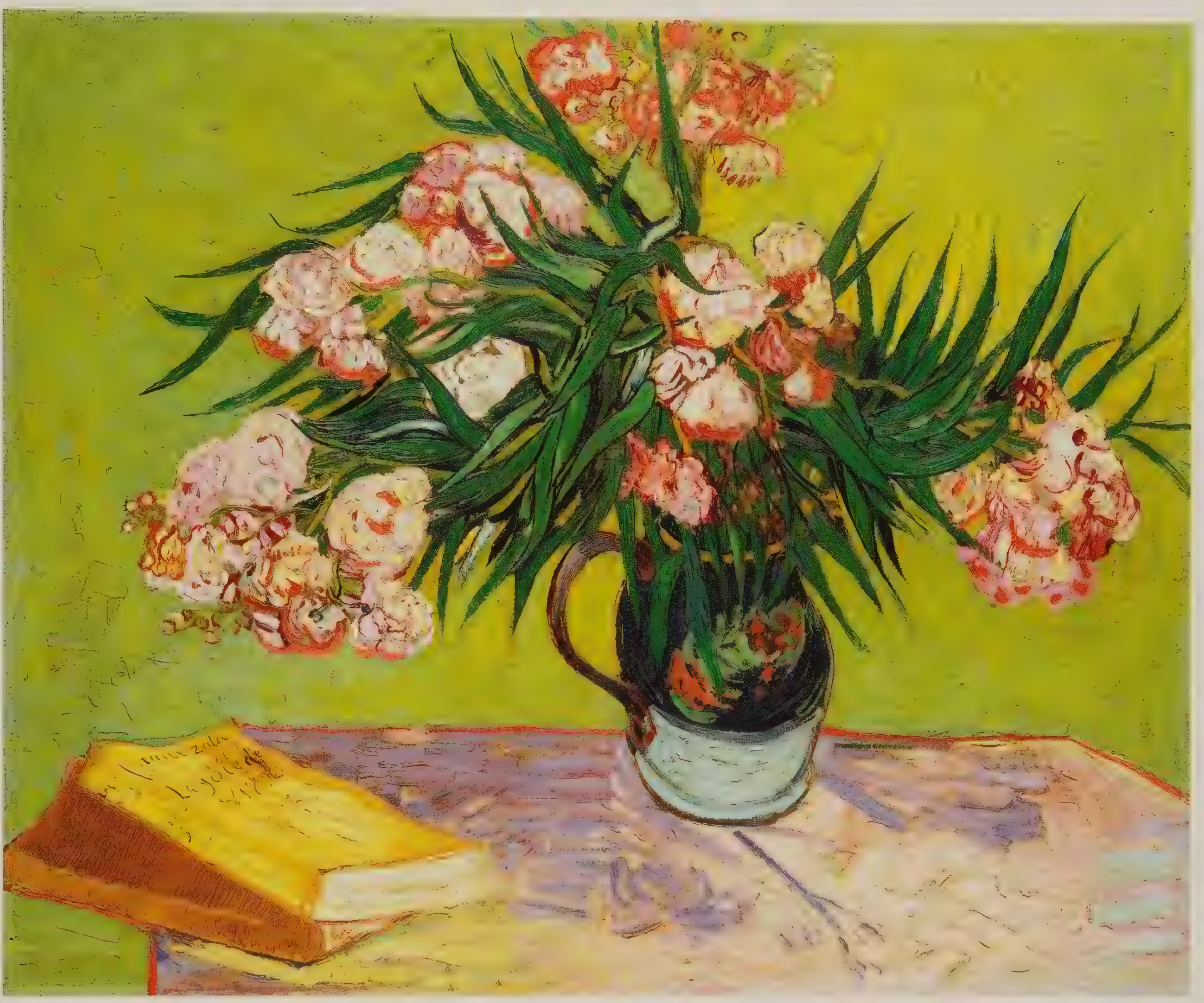

Souvenir de Mauve
Vincent



81
Still life with coffeepot
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 81 cm
Private collection



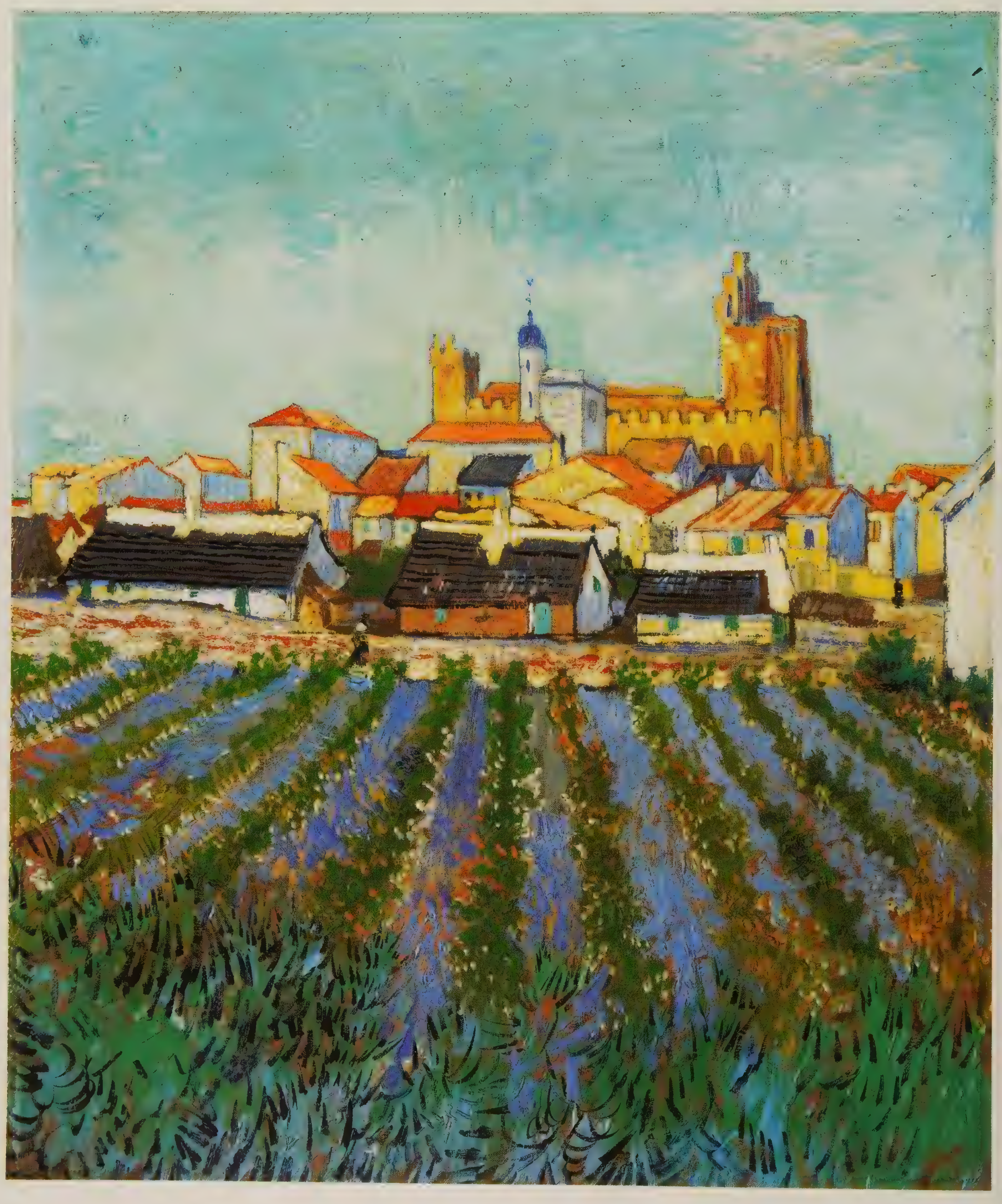
82
Still life
1888
oil on canvas
55 x 46 cm
Barnes Foundation,
Merion, Pennsylvania



83
Oleanders
1888
oil on canvas
60 x 73 cm
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York,
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John L. Loeb

painted *en plein air*, unlike some of his smaller studies of orchards, he considered this painting to be 'probably the best I've ever made.' [592/472]. Inscribing it to his old teacher Mauve, who had recently died, he asked Theo to give the painting to his newly-widowed cousin, an indication of how strongly memories of Holland were flooding back now that he had left Paris.

The decision to convey the south in terms of heightened colour was a conscious and, to some degree, an arbitrary one. Van Gogh recognised that a major drawback of this method was that he would lose sight of the very aspects of painting that had preoccupied him in the north, namely tonal values, the subtle greys. 'But by intensifying all the colours one arrives once again at tranquillity and harmony,' he told his sister [593/W3]. In many of his landscapes the Japanese influence remains strong. Figures are

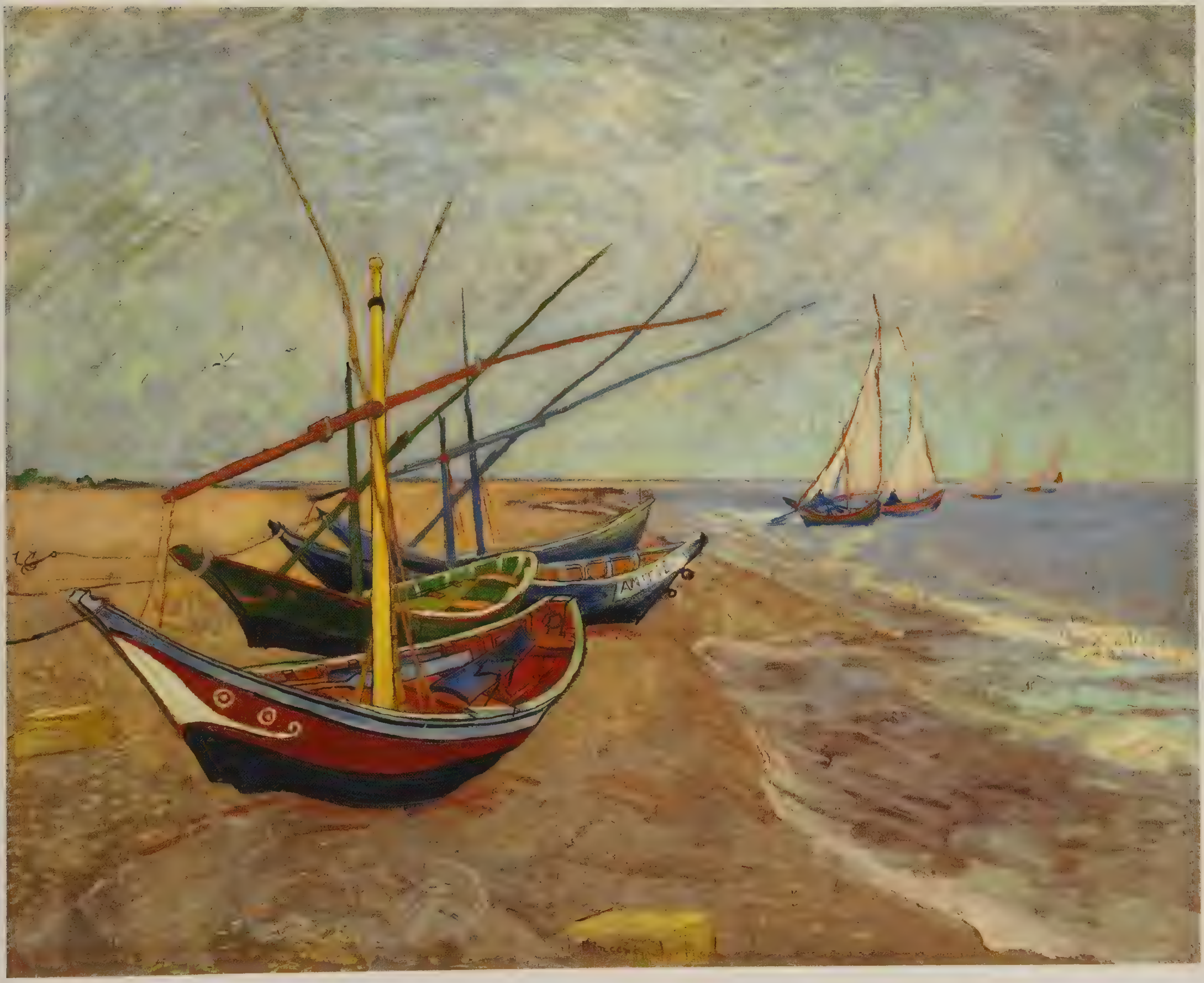


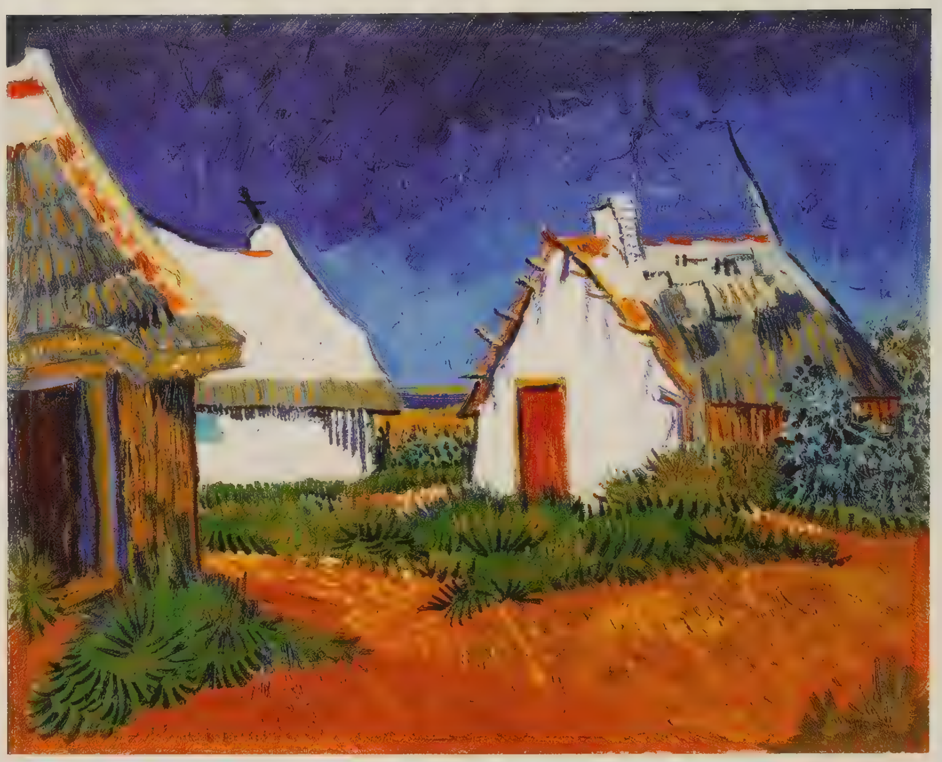
kept small, and where they are introduced in the form of washerwomen, haymakers or strolling lovers, they play the same incidental role as figures in Japanese landscape prints.

Van Gogh's imagination was busy processing recent encounters in Paris and the debates going on in the art world, and he kept himself abreast of developments there through Theo. Every time he picked up the brush, he thought of himself in relation to others, comparing his methods and results, not unfavourably, with styles that were now familiar to him, with artists he now regarded as his peers. Faced with a whole new range of enticing motifs, he had an equally enticing range of stylistic possibilities to consider. Although physically isolated, Van Gogh was happily conscious of, and conscientious about, playing a part in a bigger story, one in which Impressionism

84
View of
Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer
1888
oil on canvas
64 x 53 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

85
Fishing boats on the beach
at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer
1888
oil on canvas
64 x 81 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



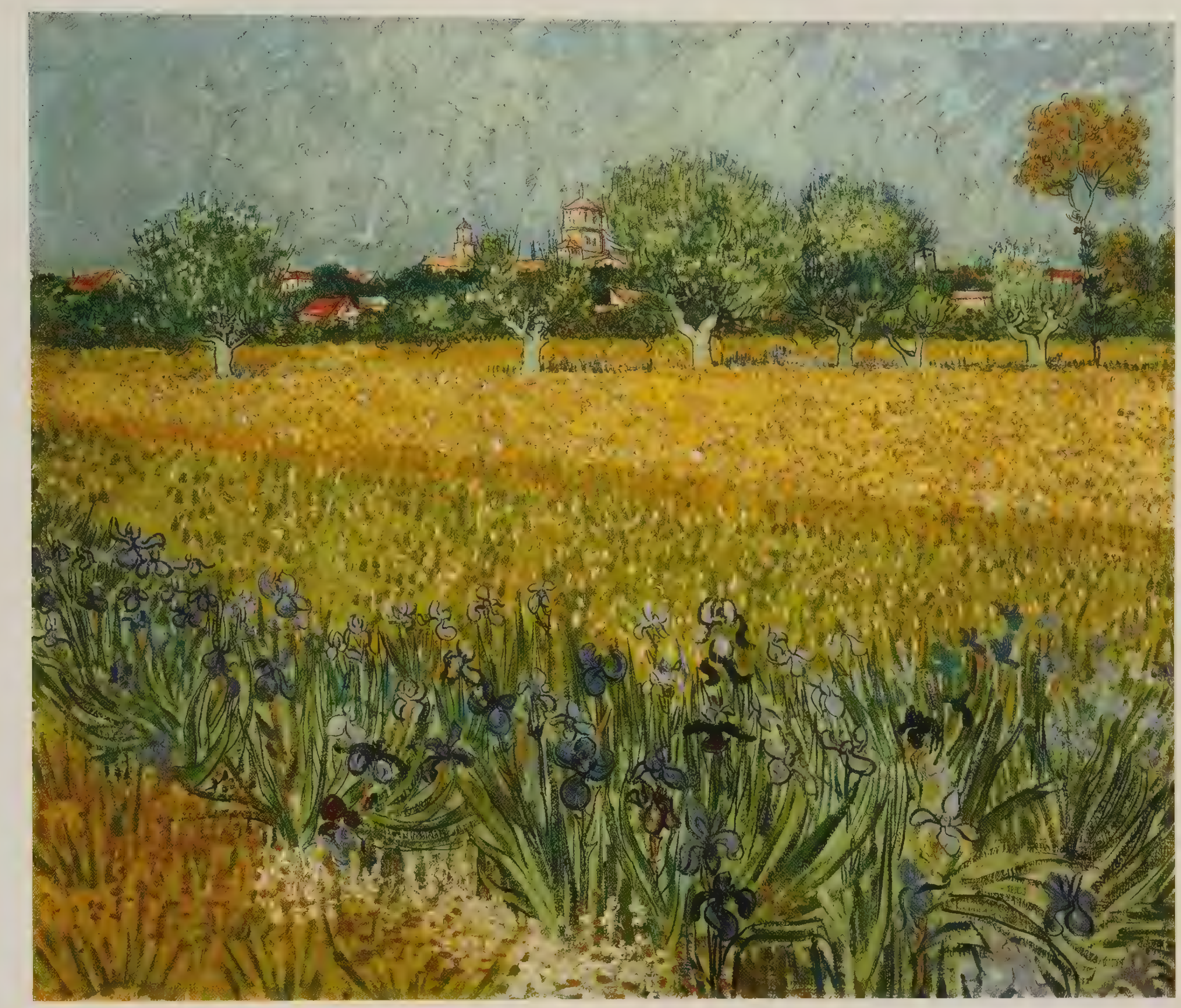


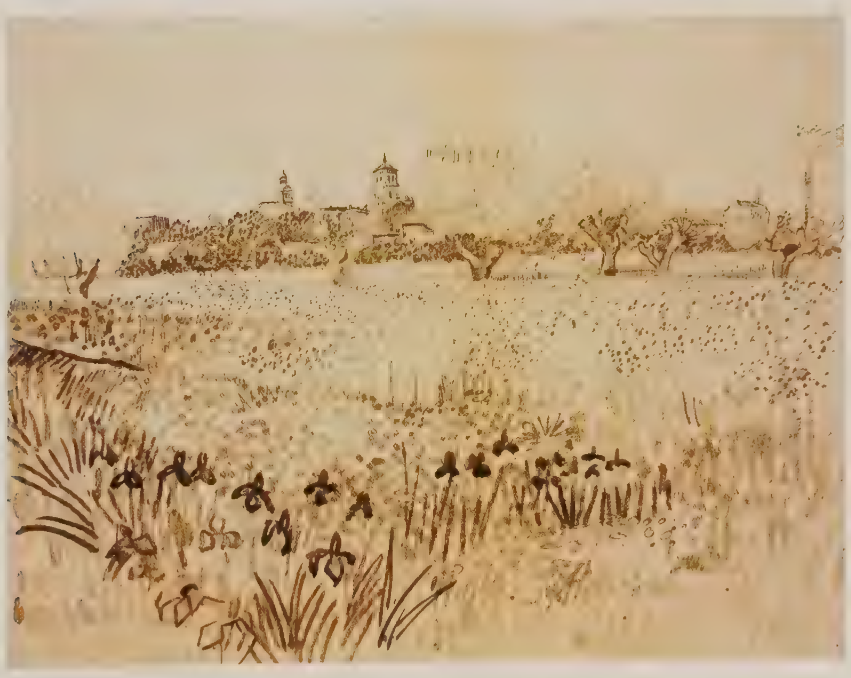
86
White cottages
at Les Saintes-Maries
1888
oil on canvas
33 x 41 cm
Kunsthaus, Zürich,
Donation Walter Haefner

might come to be considered as important a historical shift as the Renaissance had been.

Van Gogh reasoned that his best contribution lay in the practical business of making pictures. He increased his work rate, setting himself ambitious targets of productivity to justify the high demands he was making of Theo in terms of materials: 'I feel that in these surroundings there is everything one needs to do good work. So it will be my own fault if I don't succeed. Mauve painted and sold in a single month 6000 francs' worth of watercolours.' [609/485] The rhythms of his work were to some extent determined by outside factors such as the weather and the season. If rain was not much of a problem, the biting mistral that gathered force as it funnelled down the Rhône valley was a phenomenon he had not encountered before. Blossom time in April was short-lived, so he worked 'as one possessed' to capture it. May was the flowering season for irises and roses. In June he braved the midday sun, driven on by the urgent desire to capture the scenes of harvesting. By August the desire to paint flowers returned, this time oleanders, dahlias and sunflowers.

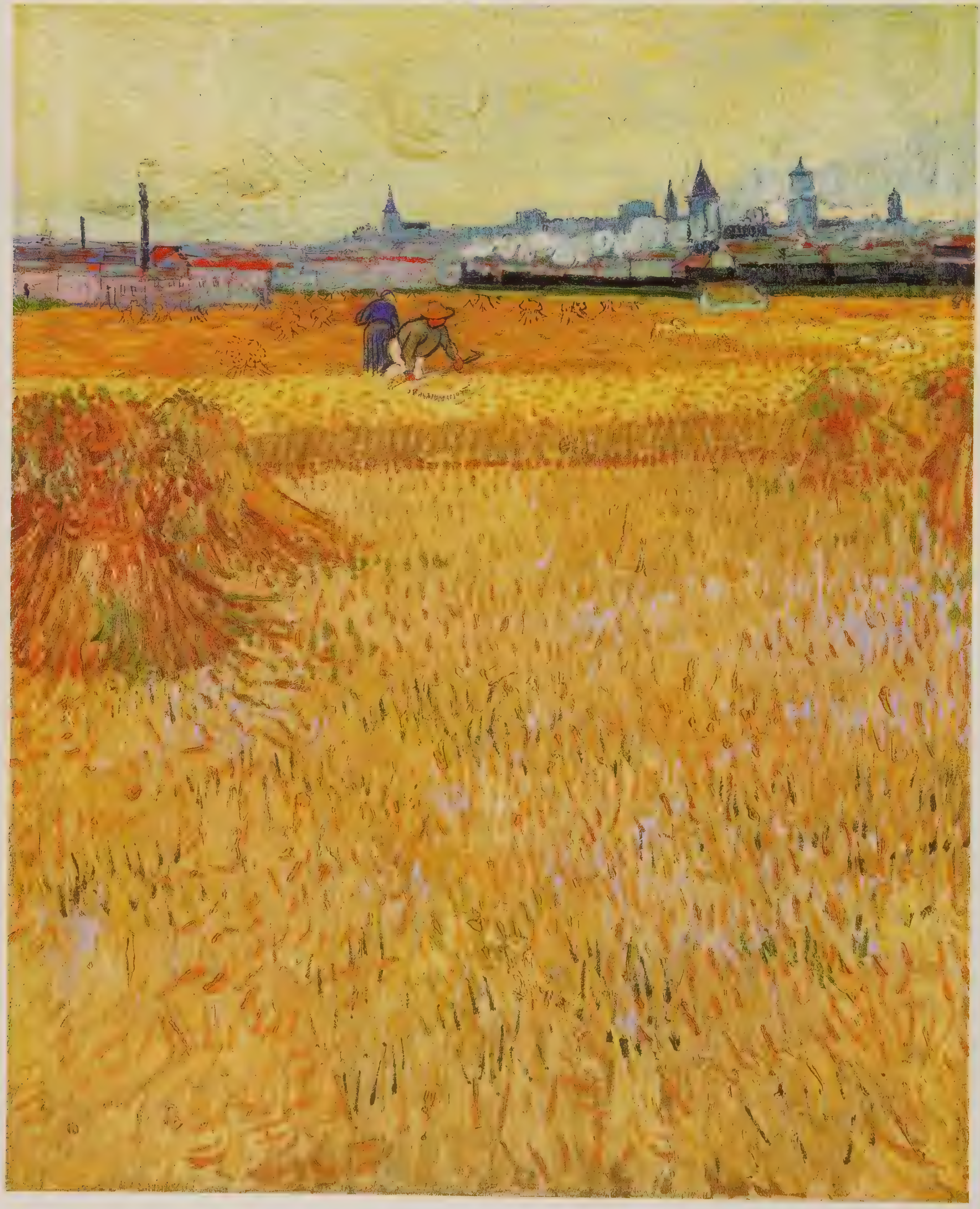
Still life was a solution when the weather prevented outdoor work. In May Van Gogh painted two still lifes (often overlooked in the Van Gogh literature) that mark an entirely new stylistic departure, one no longer in any way beholden to Impressionism (ill. 81, 82). Instead of the broken striations and halo effects that had characterised his late Paris still lifes, colour is here applied flatly and smoothly, while the objects themselves – whose shapes are clean and forceful – provide all the decorative interest. This change is



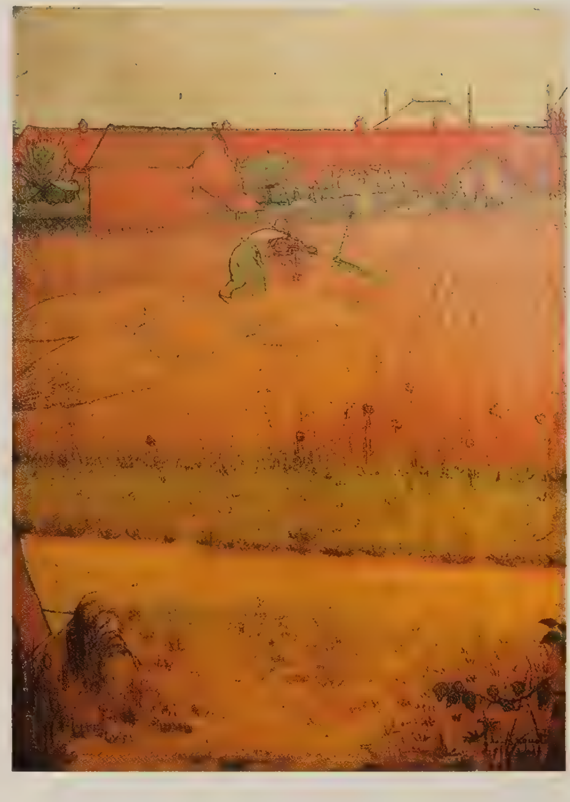


87
Field with flowers near Arles
1888
oil on canvas
54 x 65 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

88
View of Arles
1888
reed pen, pen, ink
43.5 x 55.5 cm
Museum of Art,
Rhode Island School of Design,
Providence,
Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth



explicable partly in terms of his memories of Bernard's recent cloisonist still lifes (ill. 67) and the two artists' ongoing dialogues over colour. But it is also a response to his new enthusiasm for Provençal pottery, the gaudy 'barbotine' colours of faïence and the rich yellow ochres of the local earthenware. Both compositions feature a particular 'cup with orange and blue patterns' and a 'blue barbotine or majolica' jug, decorative pieces that Van Gogh presumably picked up locally [613/489]. The same jug filled with oleanders appears in another striking still life painted a few months later; Van Gogh was fascinated by the bold structure of these sensuous pink blooms emerging from dagger-like leaves (ill. 83).

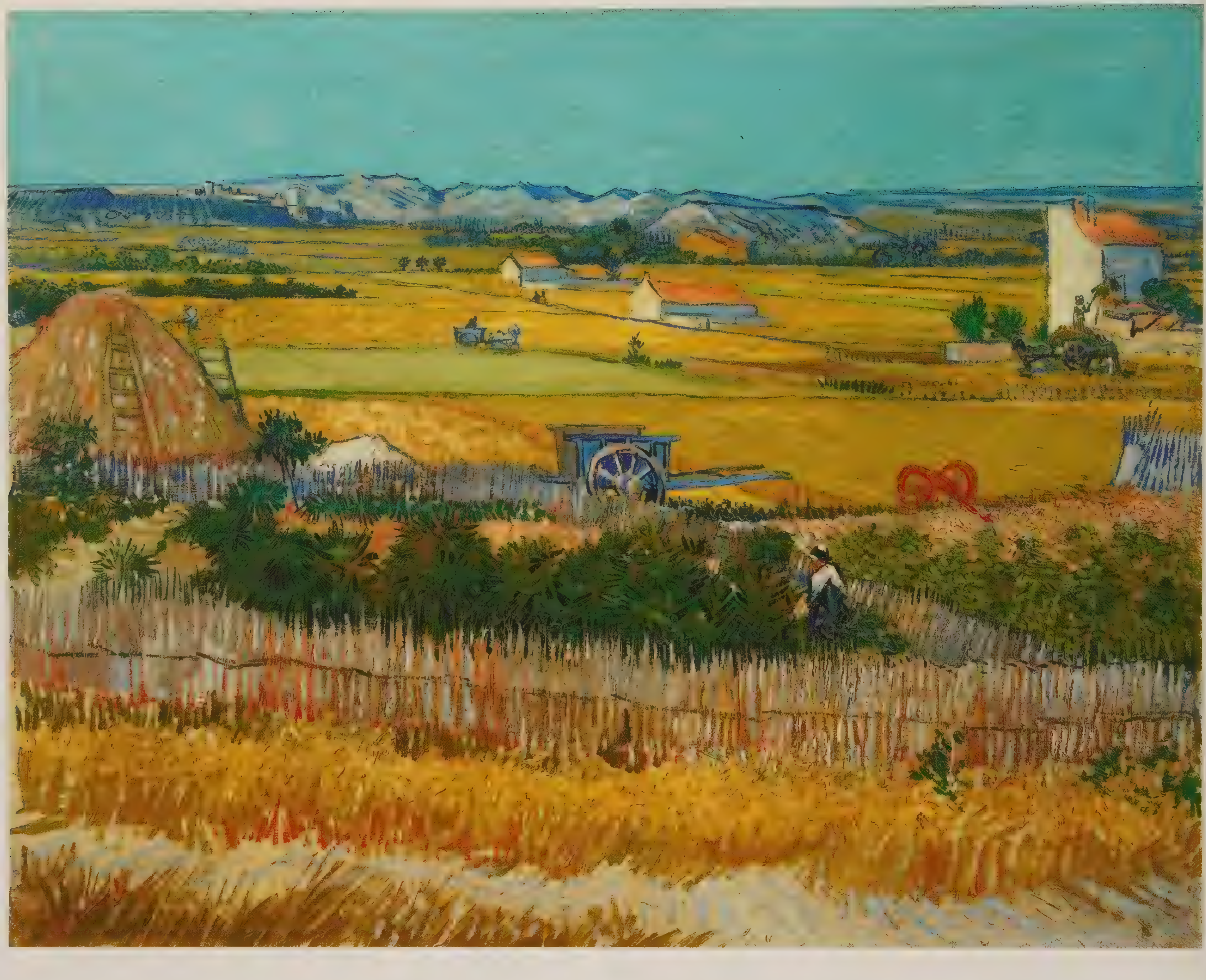


89
The mowers
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 54 cm
Musée Rodin,
Paris

90
Louis Anquetin
The mower at noon
1887
oil on canvas
69 x 52 cm
Private collection

The May still lifes led on to a cluster of high-key, even garish, landscapes painted in early June, whose subjects were prompted by a brief excursion Van Gogh made to the Mediterranean coast. The village of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer was famed as a site of Catholic pilgrimage, the legendary landing place of Mary Magdalen, Mary Jacobe and Mary Salome, accompanied by their servant Sarah (hence its importance for the Romany community). Van Gogh painted his majestic view of the village from the lavender fields, dominated by the fortified church, on the spot (ill. 84), but he was less interested in Les Saintes-Maries's religious associations than in its fleet of gaily coloured boats, drawn up on the beach or venturing out to sea, and the fishermen's thatched and whitewashed cottages, which reminded him of those in Drenthe. He completed a number of pen-and-ink drawings of these subjects and worked them up into paintings back in Arles. He rendered the beach scene, which he had observed in the early morning, in a subdued milky light (ill. 85). But with the 'naïve landscape' of the cottages, as he called it, he deliberately intensified the simultaneous contrast of blue/orange to a pitch never previously attempted. The result has more to do with the intense tones found in tin-glazed pottery than with nature (ill. 86).

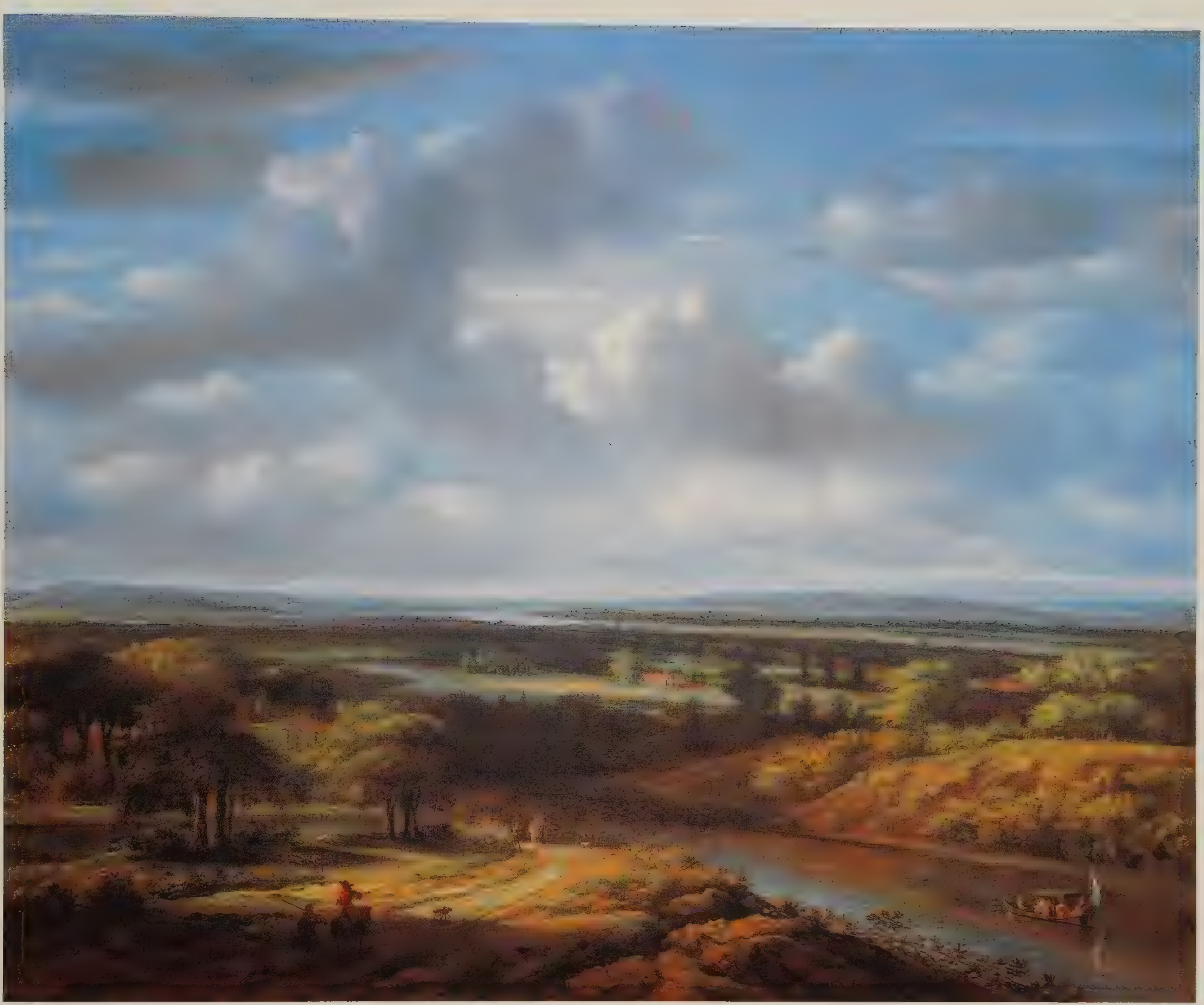
In Arles, drawing resumed major importance in Van Gogh's working practice. In the spring he had been anxious not to overtax Theo's budget, temporarily switching from the costly business of working in oils to pen and ink: 'Not being so very attached to my paintings I could leave them aside without too much complaint.' [603/479] Whether or not this surprising claim was sincere, Van Gogh resumed drawing with a renewed energy and sense of purpose, using pens fashioned from the reeds that grew wild in Provence (reed pen was a medium he had used several years earlier in Holland). Whereas in Paris there had been a tendency for certain of his



91
The harvest
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

paintings to resemble drawings in technique, now Van Gogh kept the procedures more distinct. He frequently tackled a given subject in both media, sometimes using drawing in the conventional way as a preliminary to painting, sometimes drawing the same subject afterwards. These drawings after paintings were done either to show a third party what a picture looked like or specifically to correct certain deficiencies – such as a lack of 'clearness of touch' – that he perceived in a given painting. [661/519]

This creative dialogue between drawing and painting, coupled with the fact that he now felt considerably less inhibited about working out of doors than he had in the Paris region, enabled Van Gogh to hit his stride as a landscapist during the summer of 1888. He devised a particularly happy solution to the problem of organising pictorial compositions from the flat Arles landscape, a formula he had already used in Holland (ill. 9). It involved

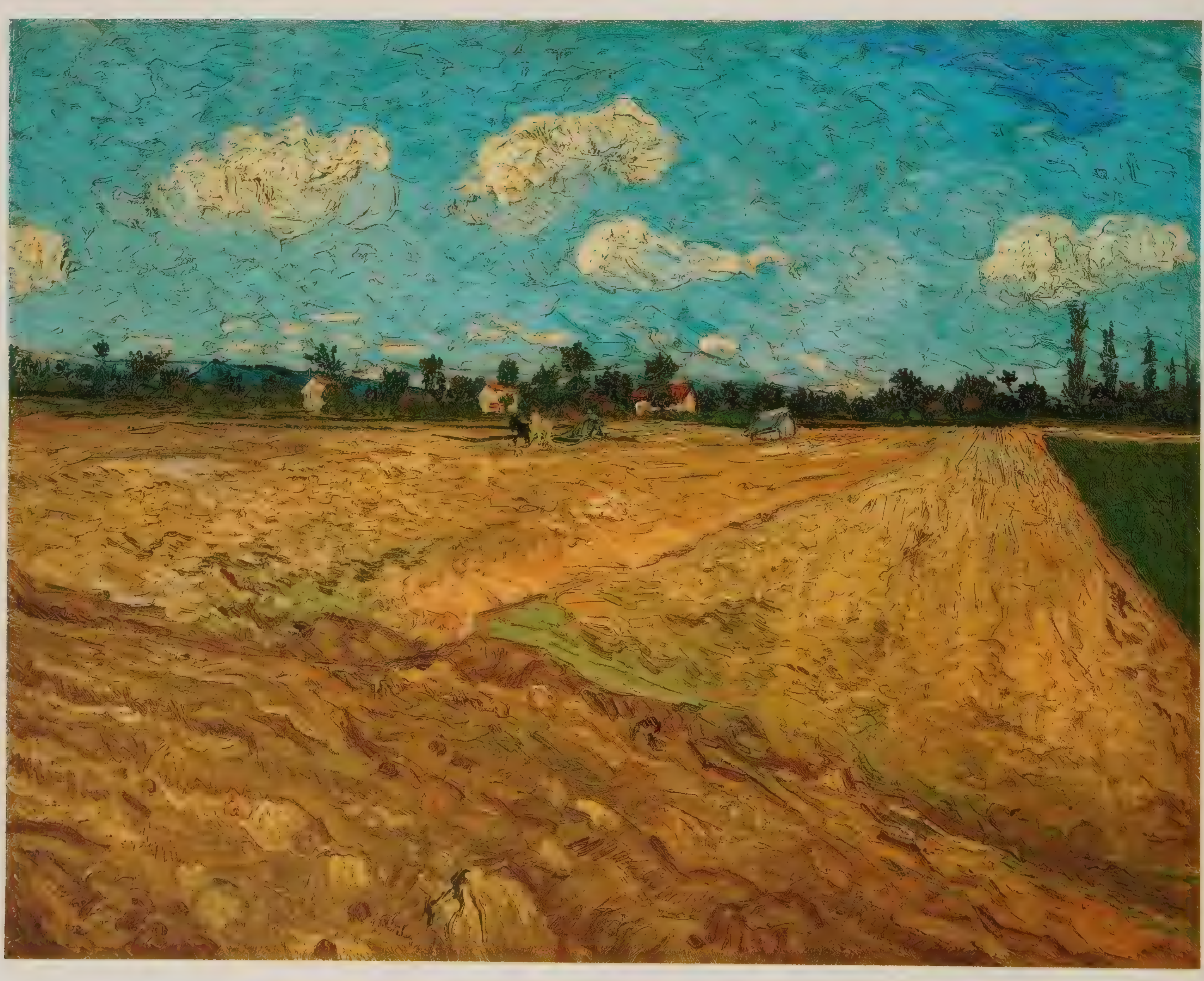


92
Philips Koninck
River landscape
1676
oil on canvas
92 x 112 cm
Rijksmuseum,
Amsterdam

concentrating all the topographical and architectural information – church steeples, factory chimneys, trains and railway lines – into a narrow band at horizon level, to which the eye is drawn by convergent diagonals, while giving over the larger foreground area to plant life. In the preparatory drawing (ill. 88) for *Field with flowers near Arles,* whose structure was established with a faint pencil grid, the pen marks are bold and emphatic. They no longer play an essentially analytical, structural role but provide an overall decorative patterning, which approximates to the complex textures of the scene depicted. In the painting that followed (ill. 87), colour comes to the fore, but there is still a rhythmic graphic quality to the brushwork. The central colour contrast of violet and yellow – a ditch of irises seen against a meadow covered with buttercups – is subdued by the soft silvery greens used for the iris leaves, the row of tree trunks and the cloud tones worked boldly into the pale blue of the sky. At horizon level, interest is provided by dense foliage and the red and pink roofs and church tower of Arles, which Van Gogh described enticingly to Bernard as 'that coquettish little town of the pretty women!' [614/B5]

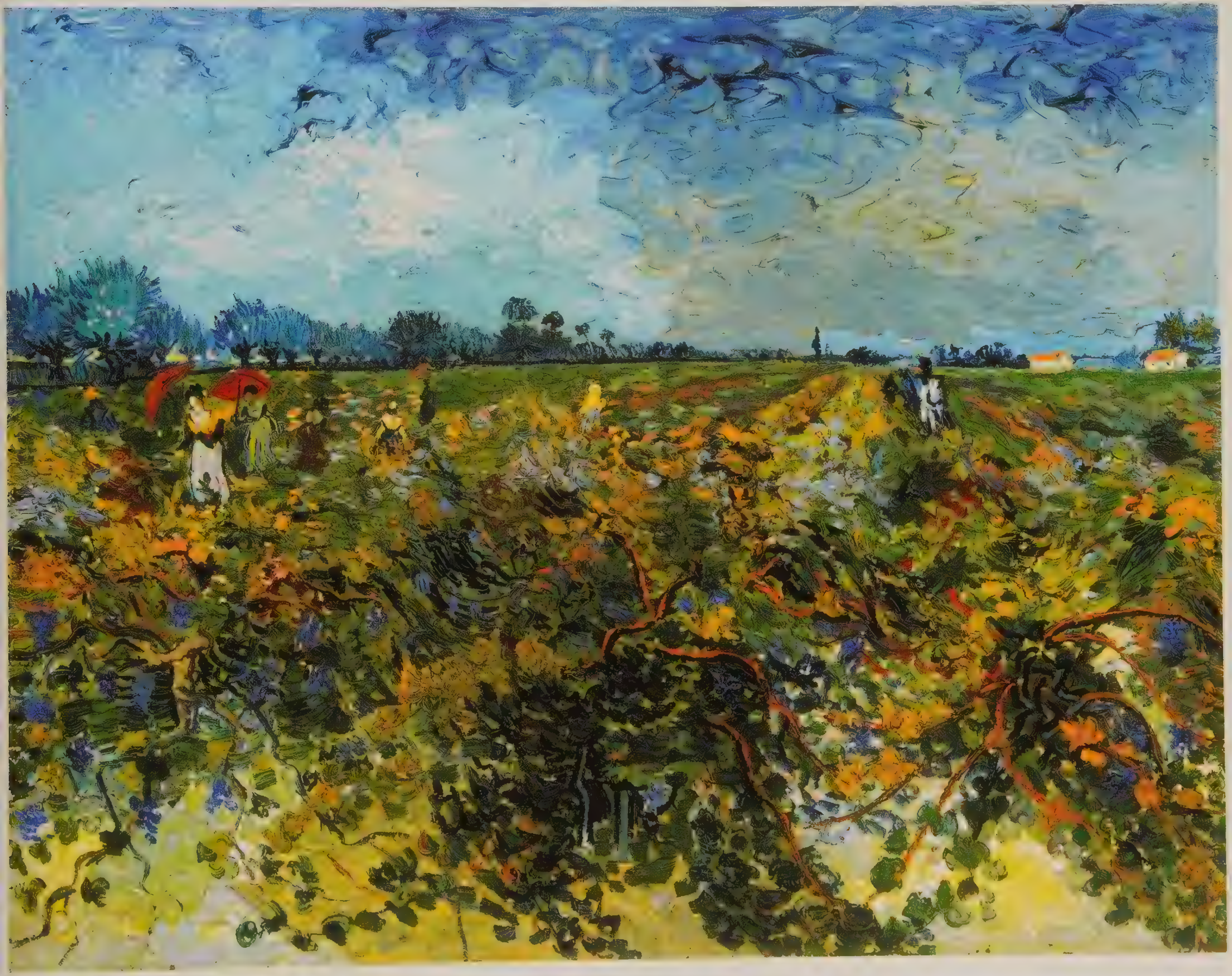
This compositional approach – which could be horizontal or vertical in format – gave him ample scope for inventive mark-making, and for varying and controlling his colour scheme, working almost musical variations on his theme. In *The mowers*, for instance, he offsets the field of wheat, a medley of yellows through which a mower toils, with a hazy blue townscape blurred by steam from factory chimneys and smoke from a passing train (ill. 89). This canvas was Van Gogh's homage to Anquetin's cloisonist interpretation of the subject with its reminiscence of old farming almanacs, which he had intensely admired the previous year (ill. 90).

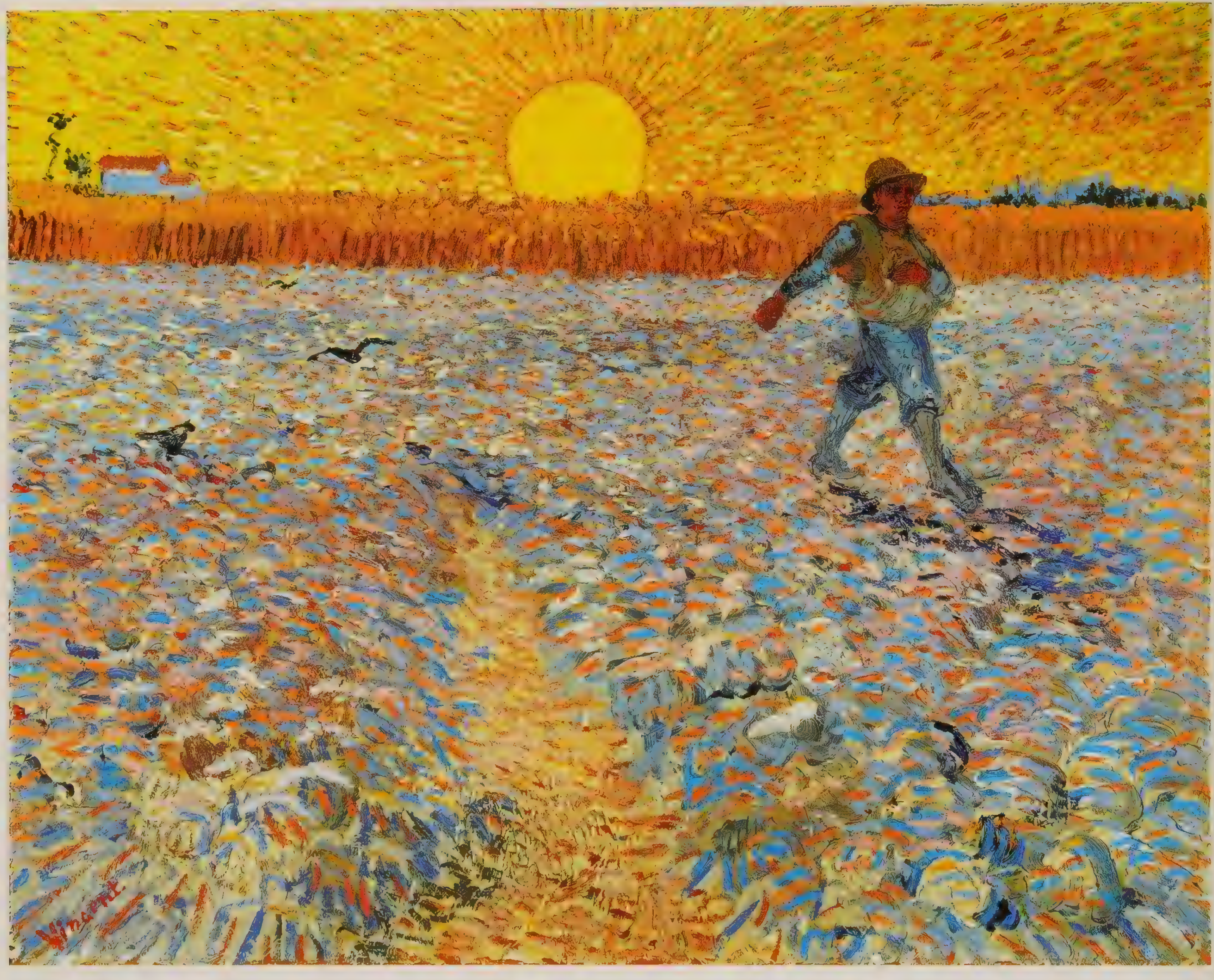
93
Ploughed fields
(The furrows)
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 92
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam



The largest and most comprehensive of Van Gogh's harvest scenes, *The harvest* (ill. 91), dates from June. His ambitious viewpoint encompasses a vast panorama, with a horizontal farm track in the foreground and a series of reed fences enclosing orchards in the middle ground, leading to distant fields and a blue line of hills. In the very centre of this complex vista he placed a blue cart; the composition is also punctuated by signs of human activity and habitation. Here Van Gogh was thinking not of his new colleagues in Paris but of the Dutch seventeenth-century landscapists (ill. 92). As the summer season drew to a close, he painted two canvases of a similar compositional structure, transforming the scene with colour and texture. For *The furrows* (ill. 93), a subject he had already tackled in the north, Van Gogh used broad brushstrokes and mellow colours to characterise earth that had just been turned over ready for the new sowing; in the

94
Green vineyard
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

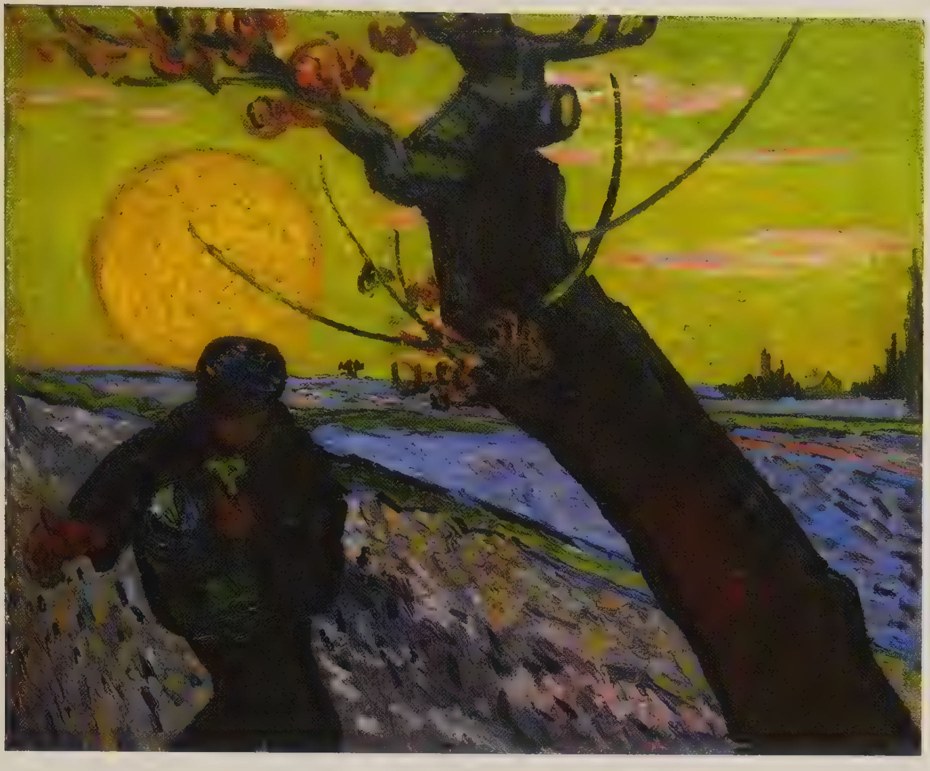




95
The sower
1888
oil on canvas
64 x 80 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

Green vineyard (ill. 94), an archetypal southern motif animated by a few Arlésiennes strolling with red parasols, the rampant vines are rendered in thick impasto, a dense mottling of short green, blue, orange and gold dabs.

Throughout his career Van Gogh was obsessed with the image of the sower, and he wanted to make a masterpiece on the theme. He had drawn the subject repeatedly in Holland in the early 1880s, using Millet as prototype. He came back to it in Arles, initially, curiously enough, in June 1888 (ill. 95). Why just then, with the harvest in full swing, should he paint such an unseasonable activity? Perhaps, immersed as he was in working in the fields, observing the culmination of the growth cycle, he was forcibly reminded of the biblical parable that speaks of the eternal cycle of nature, 'a time to sow and a time to reap' [Eccl. III, 2]; for behind his solitary sower he includes a field of ripe wheat. Whether or not the interpretation was a

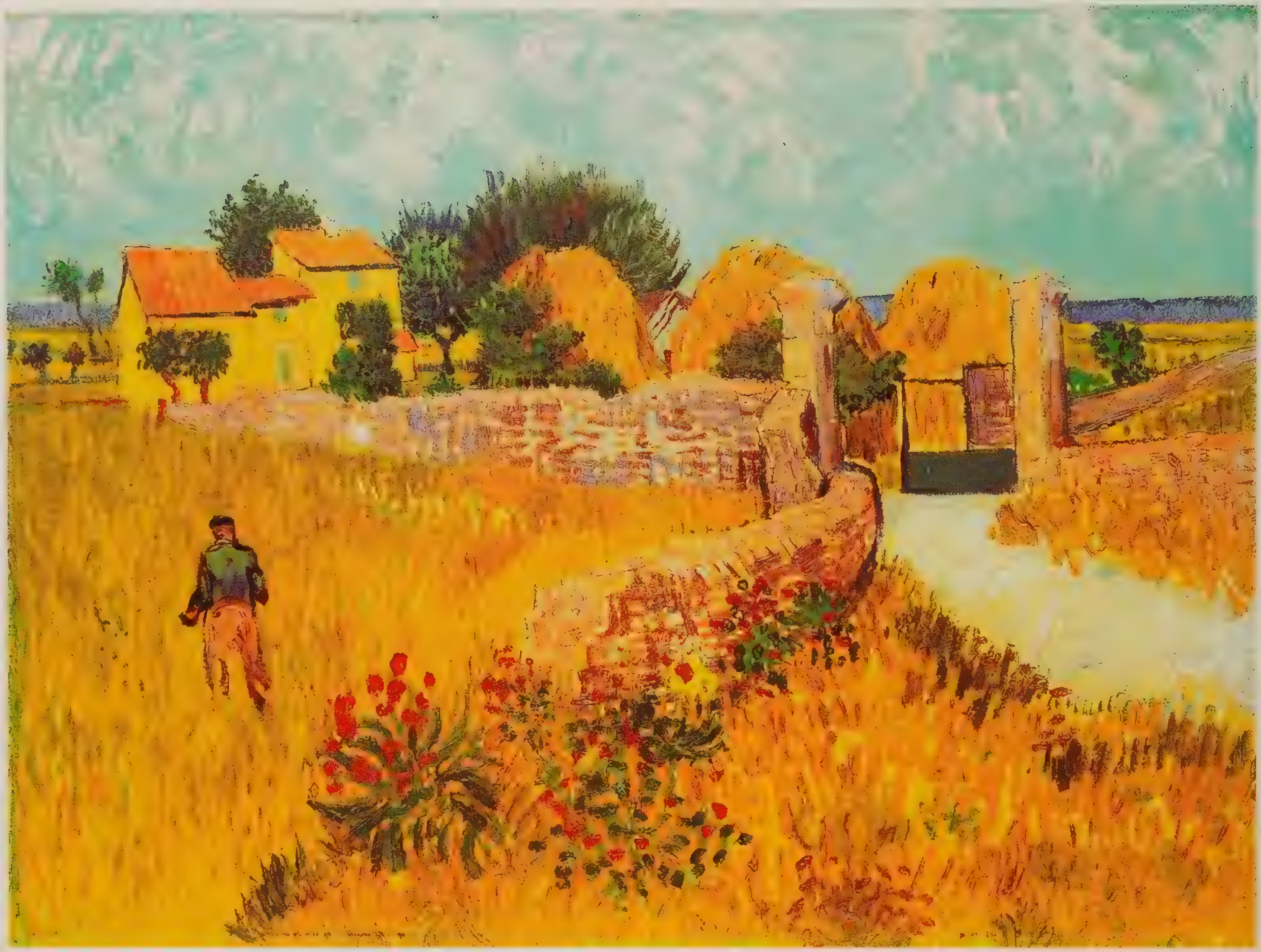


96
The sower
1888
oil on canvas
32 x 40 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

departure from reality, Van Gogh invests his sower with symbolic, universal meaning. He was thinking at the time about the primitive representations of the labours of the fields found in old farmers' almanacs.

Although begun outdoors, this laboured composition was probably continued in the studio; indeed, Van Gogh intended it to be a springboard for further work. It makes full and very deliberate use of colour complementaries; earth and sky form contrasting bands of cool and warm tone, achieved by heightening the blues and purples used for the choppy furrows and the sower and exaggerating the yellows of the sky and the low, central, radiating sun. Van Gogh reprised the sower theme several times in the autumn. At first he retained the vast expanse of field and diminutive figure; later he pulled the figure, now seen in silhouette, up to the surface, reinforcing the emotional force of the seed-scattering gesture (ill. 96). He also exaggerated the colours and forms: 'an immense lemon disk for the sun. The sky greenish yellow with pink clouds. The earth violet, the sower and the tree Prussian blue…' [727/558a] His reworked version with its diagonal tree and heightened expressiveness was surely Van Gogh's response to Gauguin's urgings towards synthesis.

WORKING AND RECORDING Van Gogh's letters provided a running commentary on his latest undertakings and gave an immediate and fresh record of them. In the main, their function seems to have been retrospective, to provide a tally of achievements that would both reassure himself and impress his correspondent. This mattered especially with Theo, to whom he

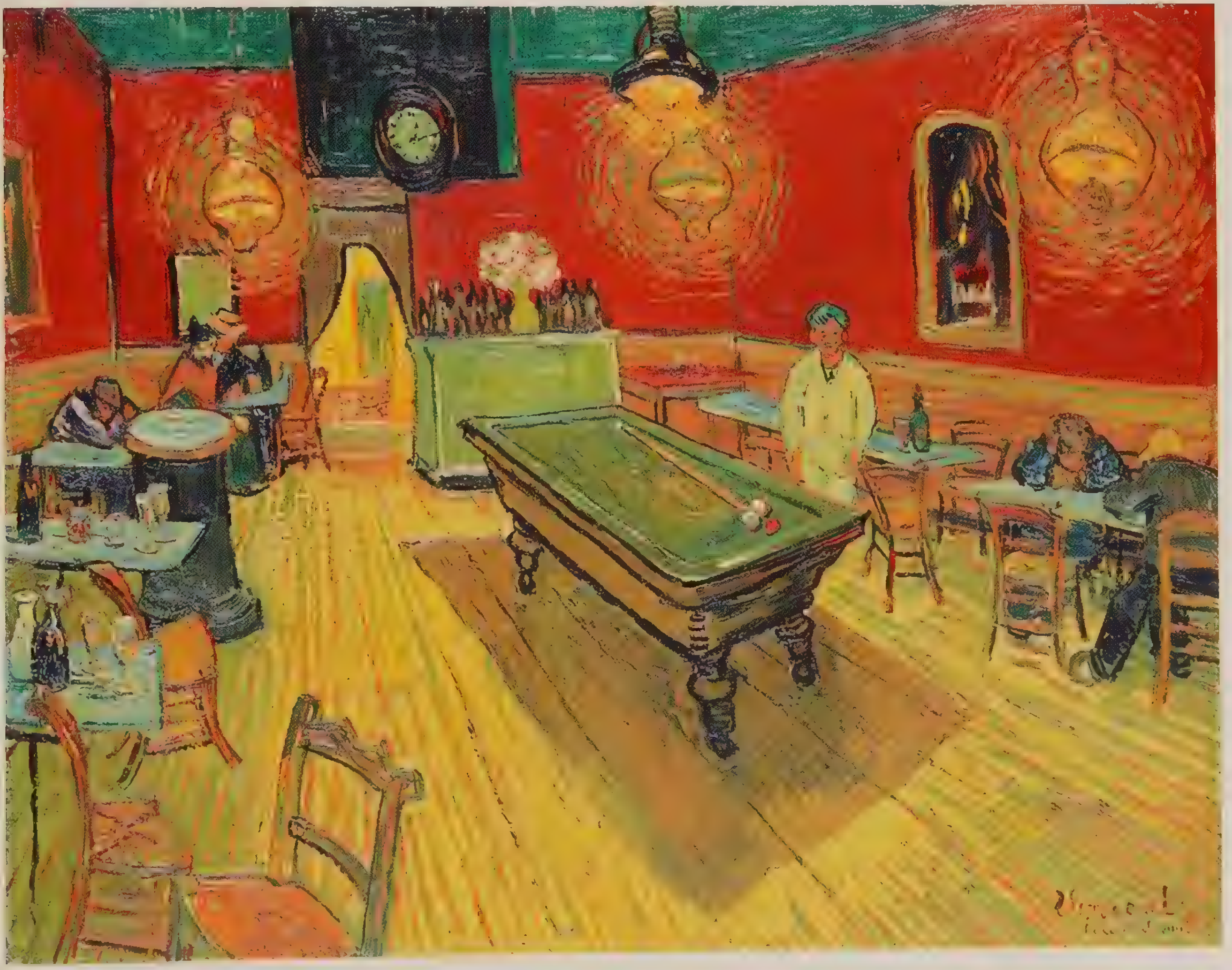


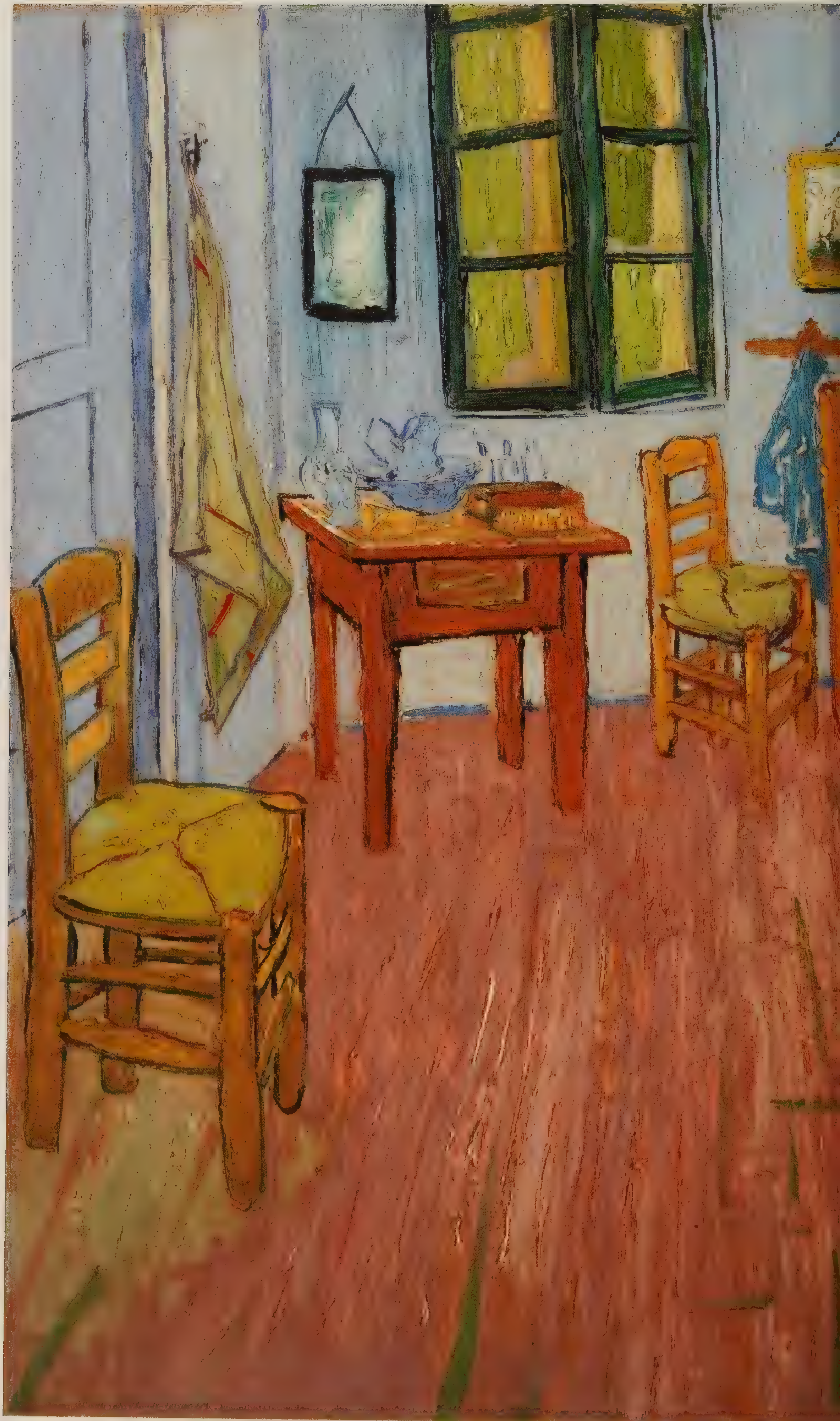
97
Farmhouse in Provence
(The farm gate)
1888
oil on canvas
46 x 61 cm
National Gallery of Art,
Washington

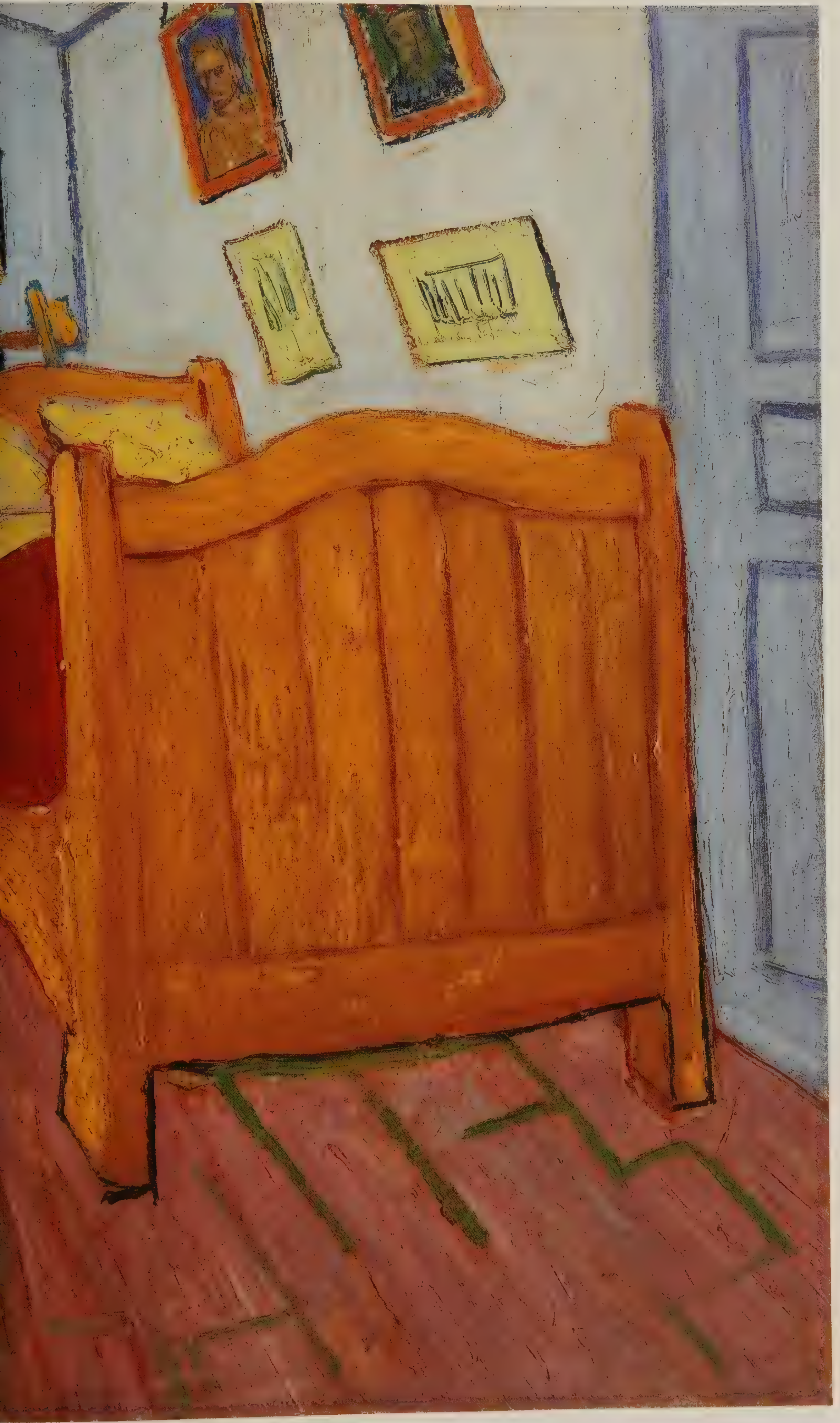
was so indebted. But they also produced vivid word pictures, which paralleled the swift decision-making that went into laying out his palette and then choosing his exact pigment. In mid-June he evoked the Midi's colours to his sister Wil in Holland with a poetic description that might correspond to the palette used in a contemporary painting such as *Farmhouse in Provence* (ill. 97): 'the colour is exquisite here. When the green leaves are fresh, it is a rich green, the like of which we seldom see in the North, quiet. When it gets scorched and dusty, it does not lose its beauty, for then the landscape gets tones of gold of various tints, green-gold, yellow-gold, pink-gold, and in the same way bronze, copper, in short starting from citron yellow all the way to a dull, dark yellow colour like a heap of threshed corn, for instance. And this combined with the blue – from the deepest royal blue of the water to the blue of the forget-me-nots, cobalt, particularly clear, bright blue – green-blue and violet-blue.' [633/W4]

Occasionally Van Gogh looks ahead in his letters, setting out broad ambitions and principles for future undertakings. One of the paintings on which he deliberated more than most was *The night café* (ill. 98), the first complex figure composition he attempted in Arles. At the time Bernard was going on and on about brothel subjects and had sent Van Gogh some sketches he had made on this theme. Their discussion probably encouraged Van Gogh to take on a comparable subject, although he was at pains to point out that his night café (in fact the Café de la Gare was where Van Gogh often ended his evenings) was no brothel, even if pimps and their molls were among the night prowlers who frequented it. It was a place which he felt was beset by emotions of tension and despair. To conjure these specific emotions, he chose a clashing colour contrast of red and green. He planned the composition for some weeks before eventually realising it over three consecutive nights' work. Ironically, a month later he more or less repeated the composition, with its funnelling perspective and glimpse into deeper space beyond the room, in a painting of his own bedroom (ill. 99). Yet here Van Gogh wanted to convey a wholly different mood, a sense of the peacefulness his new abode brought him, a salutary refuge from the

98
The night café
in Place Lamartine in Arles
1888
oil on canvas
70 x 89 cm
Yale University Art Gallery,
New Haven







99
The bedroom
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 90 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

nighthawk existence that he had known hitherto. In contrast to the spare, four-square furniture and the more subdued tones of the walls and floor, the sensuous wedge of red paint denoting the bedcover is trowelled on with a flourish.

100
La mousmé
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 60 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection

> 101
Patience Escalier
1888
oil on canvas
69 x 56 cm
Private collection

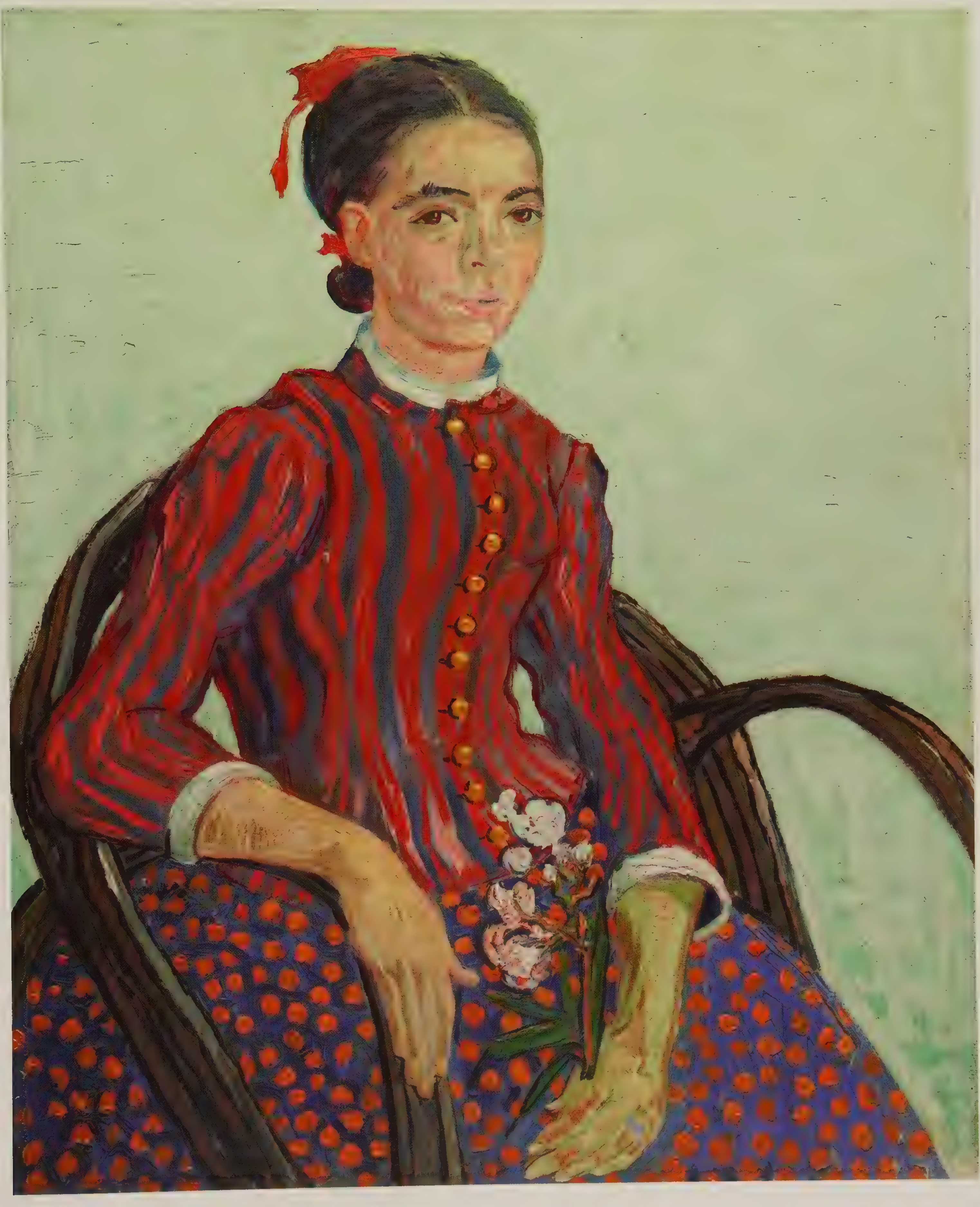
> 102
The Zouave
1888
oil on canvas
81 x 65 cm
Private collection

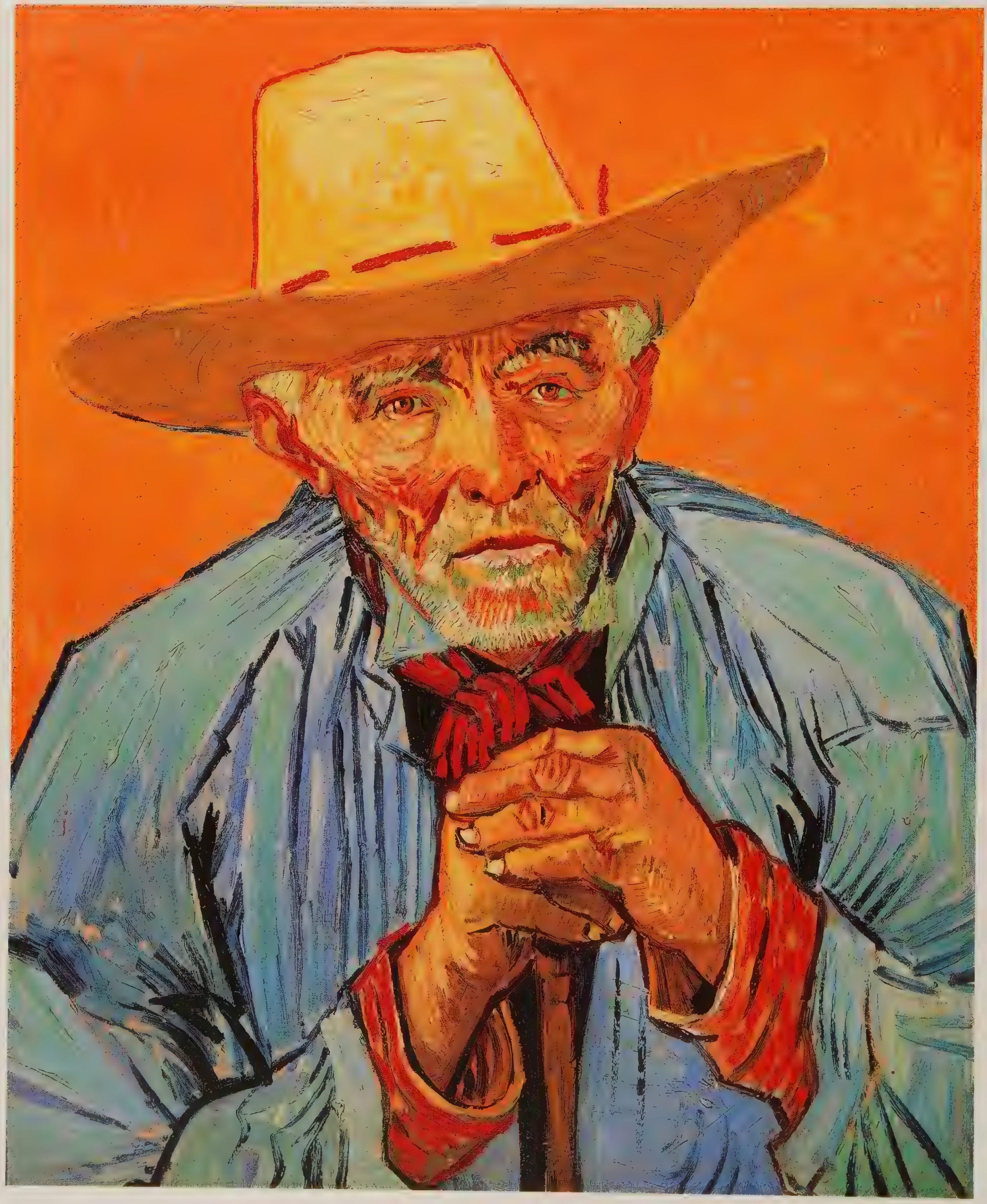
>> 103
The lover (Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet)
1888
oil on canvas
60 x 50 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

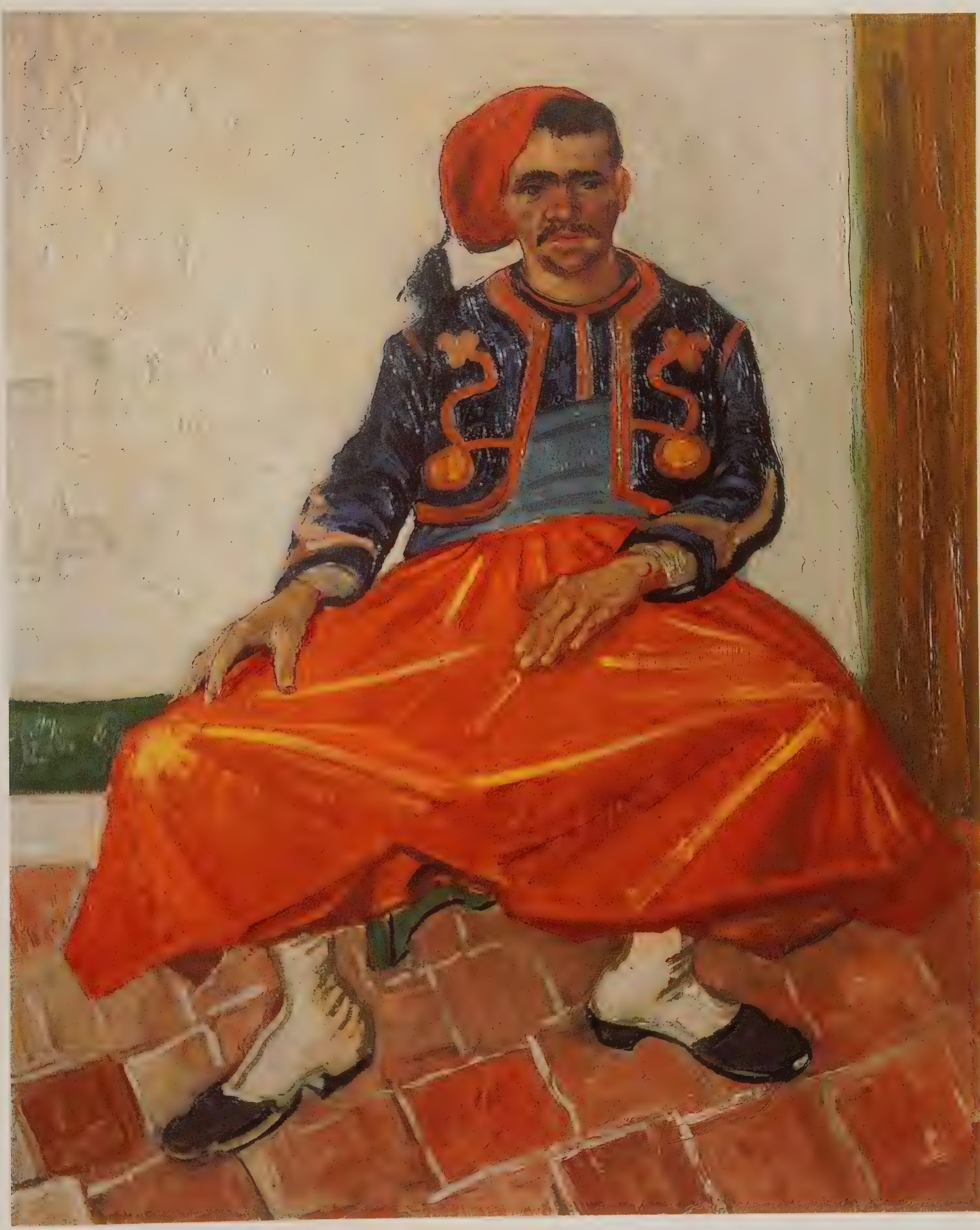
>> 104
Portrait of Joseph Roulin
1889
oil on canvas
65 x 54 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

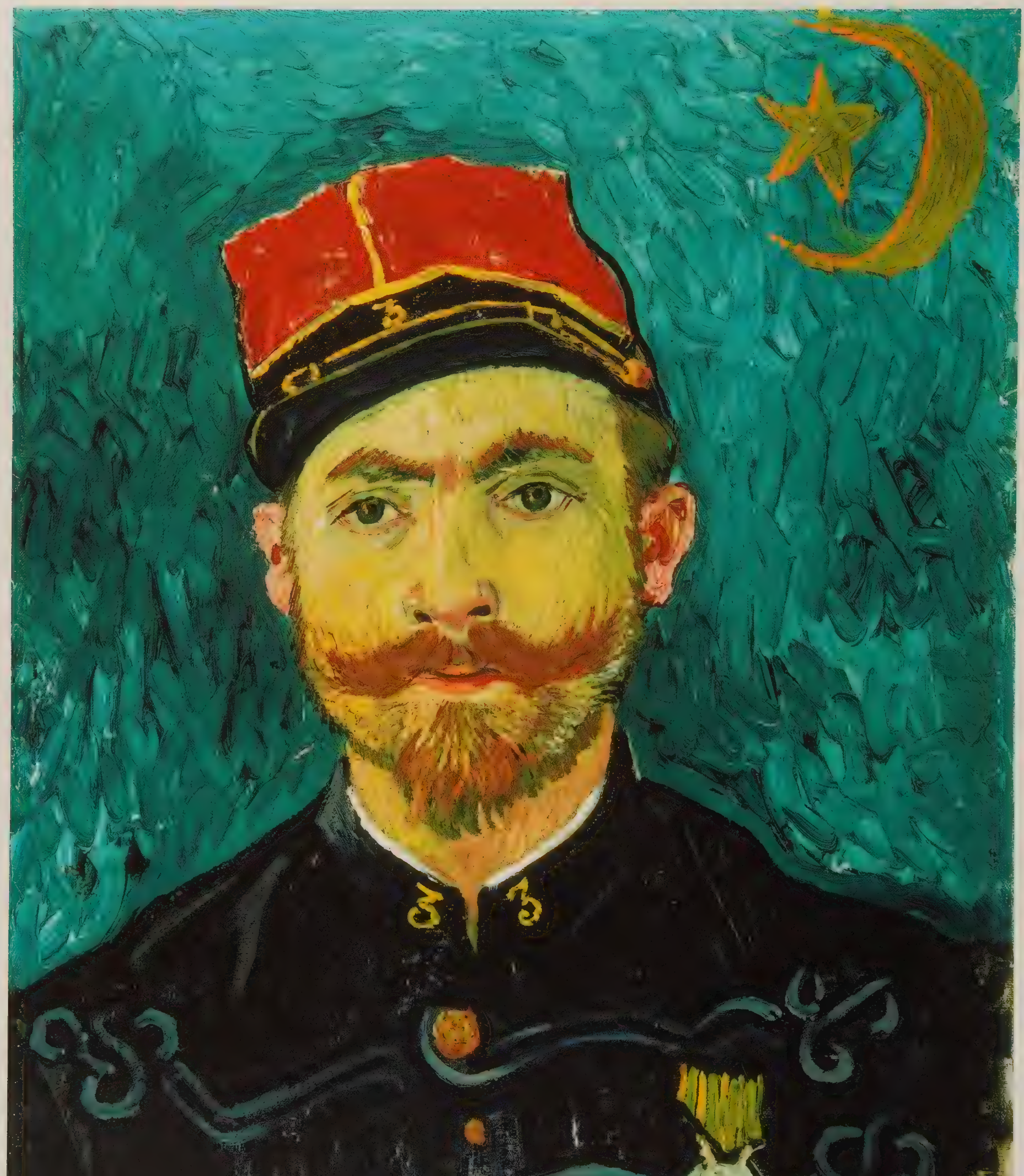
MODERN PORTRAITURE In August 1888 Van Gogh spoke with renewed enthusiasm in his letters about the grand plan he had for painting modern portraits. Mooted some months earlier, this idea had its origins in his admiration for the work of his countryman Frans Hals (1581/5-1666), who had managed to paint 'a whole republic'. At first in Arles he had had little luck with finding models; women especially seem to have been wary of his approaches, so it had been particularly pleasing at the end of July to bring off a portrait of a young girl (ill. 100). In giving her the Japanese designation 'La mousmé' Van Gogh betrays his continuing fascination with Japan and his recent reading of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887). But with men he found it was easy enough to approach a stranger in a café and offer to pay for his drinks if he would agree to pose. The sequence of powerful male portraits he completed in the summer seems to have come about in this spontaneous way, and Van Gogh worked rapidly lest the sitter change his mind. The precariousness of these transactions seems to have added some indefinable frisson to the pleasure Van Gogh had in bringing a portrait to successful fruition, not least, perhaps, because of the impressive effect his rapid workmanship and ability to catch a likeness had on those present. Soon he had the satisfaction of a number of portraits in his portfolio: *Patience Escalier* (ill. 101), an aged peasant in blue smock, still hot and sweaty from toiling in the fields, *The Zouave* (ill. 102), a swarthy infantryman wearing his North African regiment's gaudy uniform, and *Joseph Roulin* (ill. 104), proud to be painted in his postman's cap. Van Gogh strove to convey through each portrait something of the sitter's social status and life: with Escalier, he explained, 'the colour is suggestive of the broiling air of the midday harvest in a heatwave...' [669/B15] His perception of the peasant was of a man scarcely removed from a wild beast, similar to the characters in Zola's *La Terre* (1887). He also painted Lieutenant Milliet, a soldier with the Zouaves whom he had befriended, against a star and crescent moon, a reference to his future posting in Algeria (ill. 103). He felt Milliet embodied the type of the lover, because he was popular with the ladies and a regular client of the local brothel. With Roulin, whom he painted no fewer than six times, he wanted to convey something of the man's fierce republicanism.

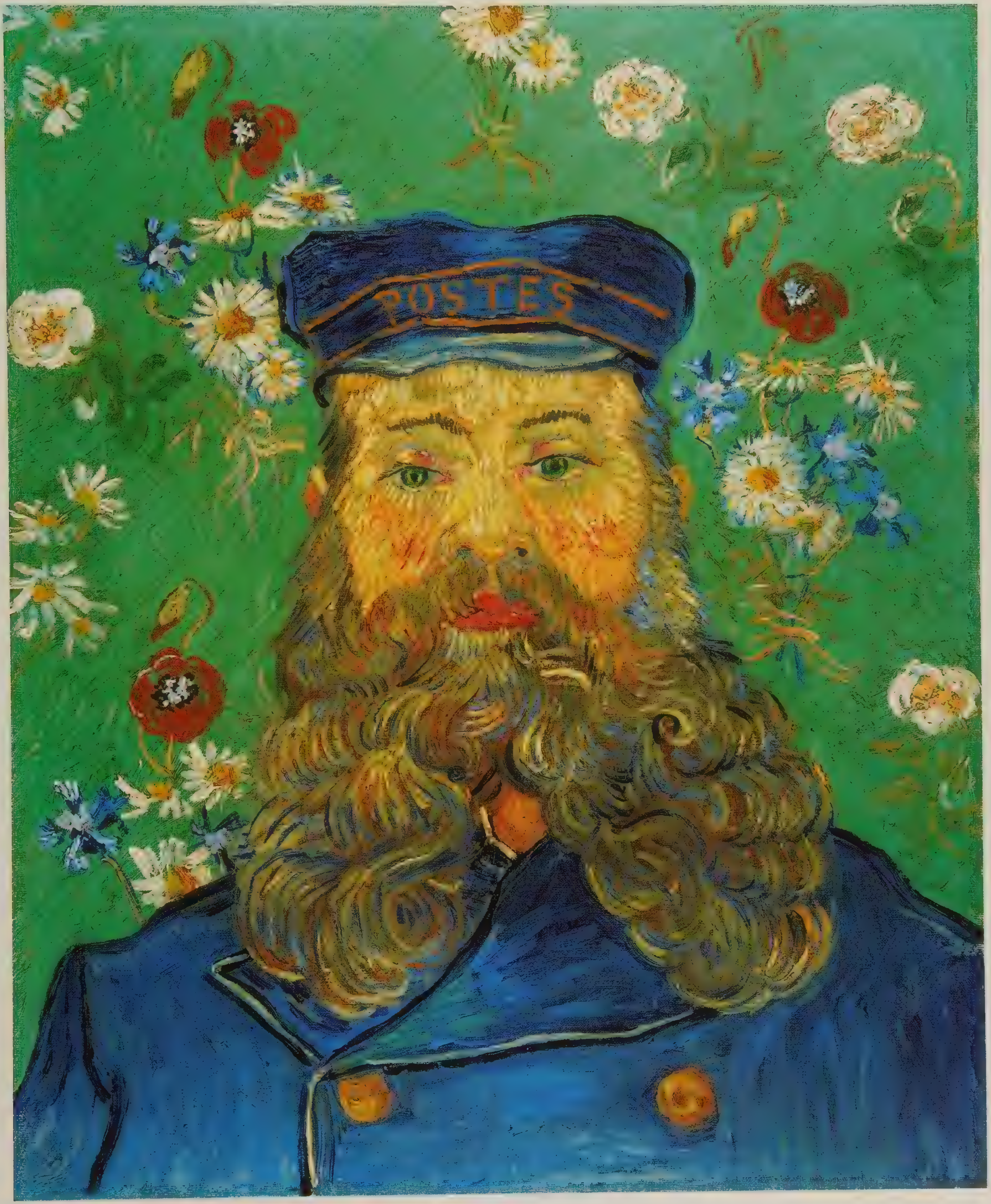
In his letters he was insistent about communicating such touches of background detail, and at some level Van Gogh clearly expected his viewers to absorb them too. He believed that in the field of modern portraiture he could play a role similar to that of Balzac and Flaubert, the realist novelists

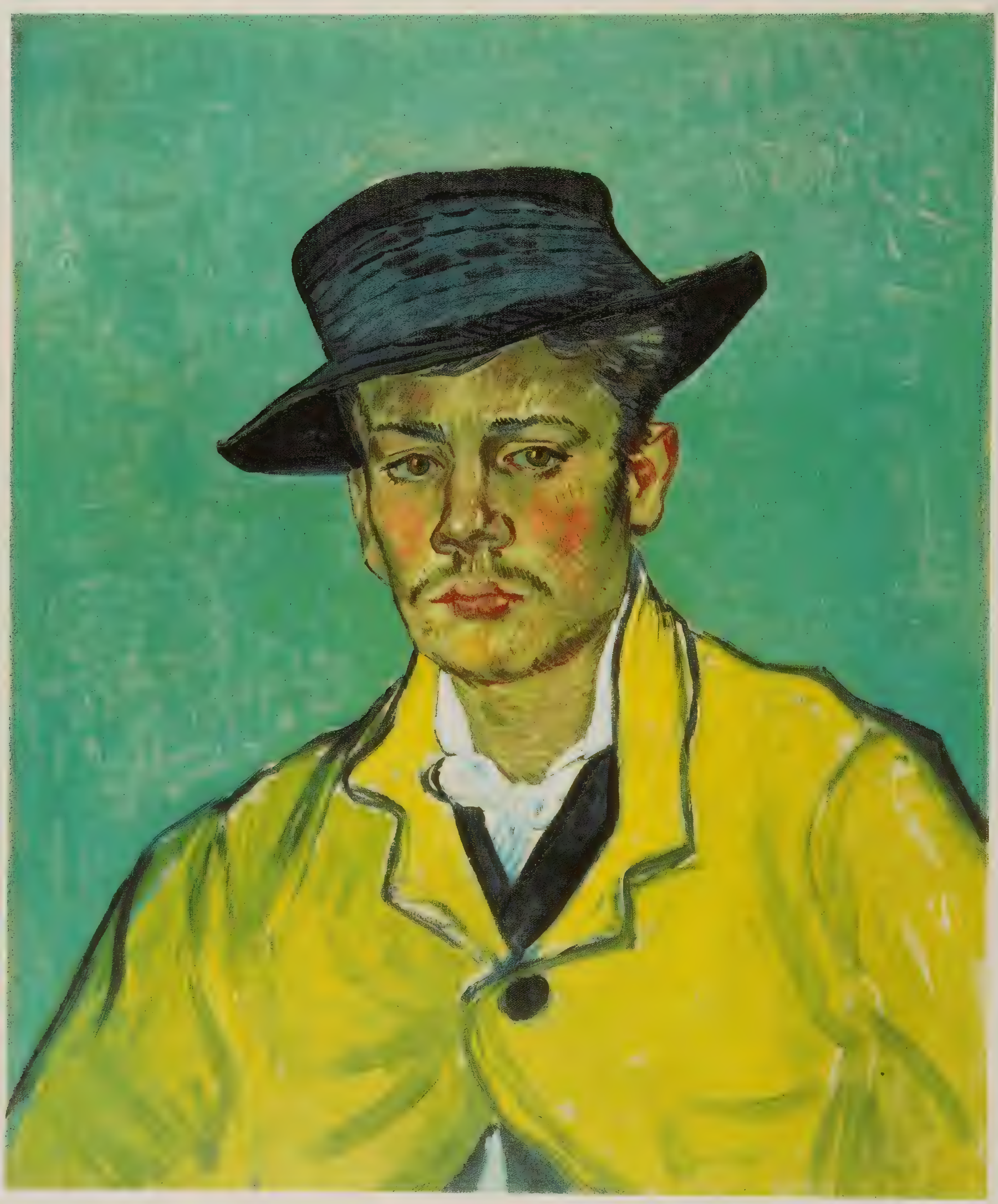


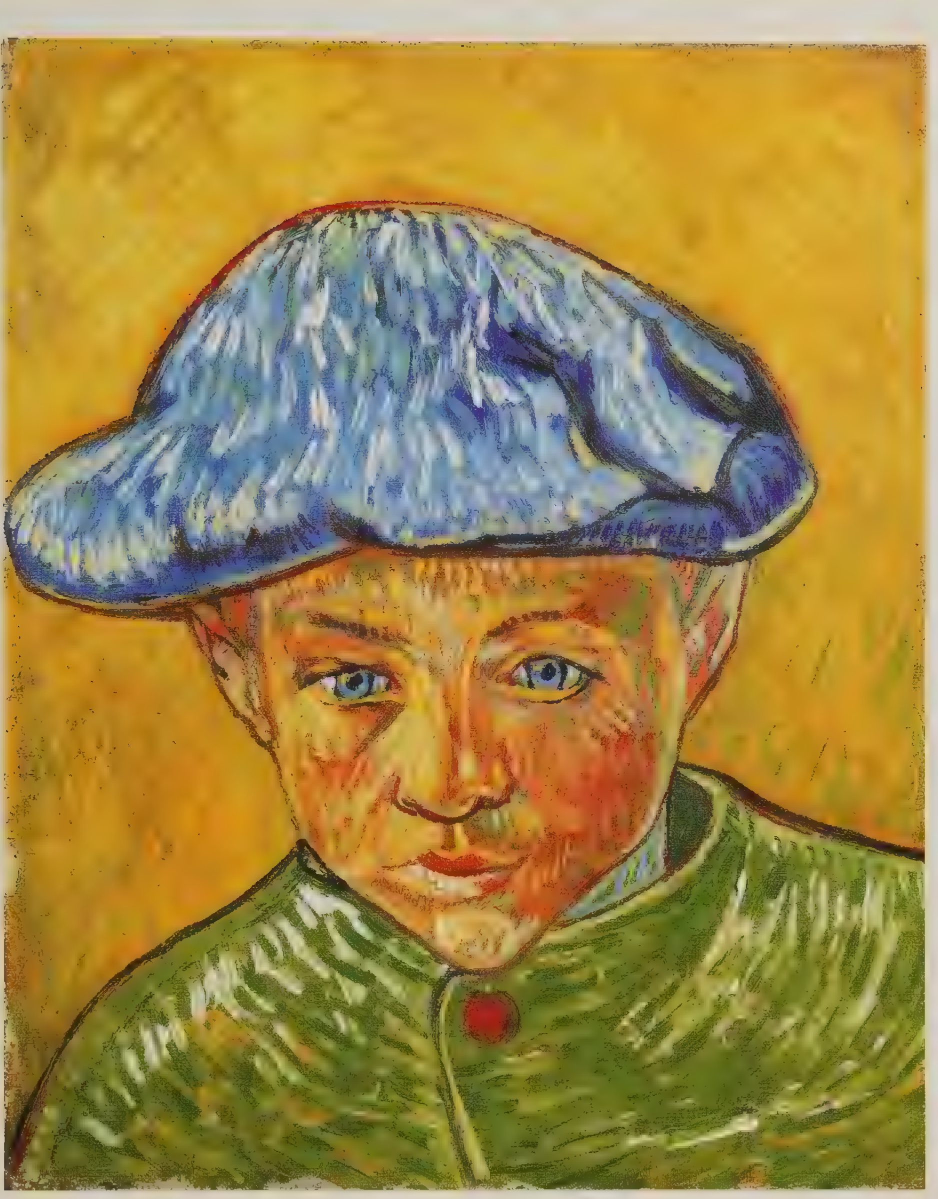







POSTES



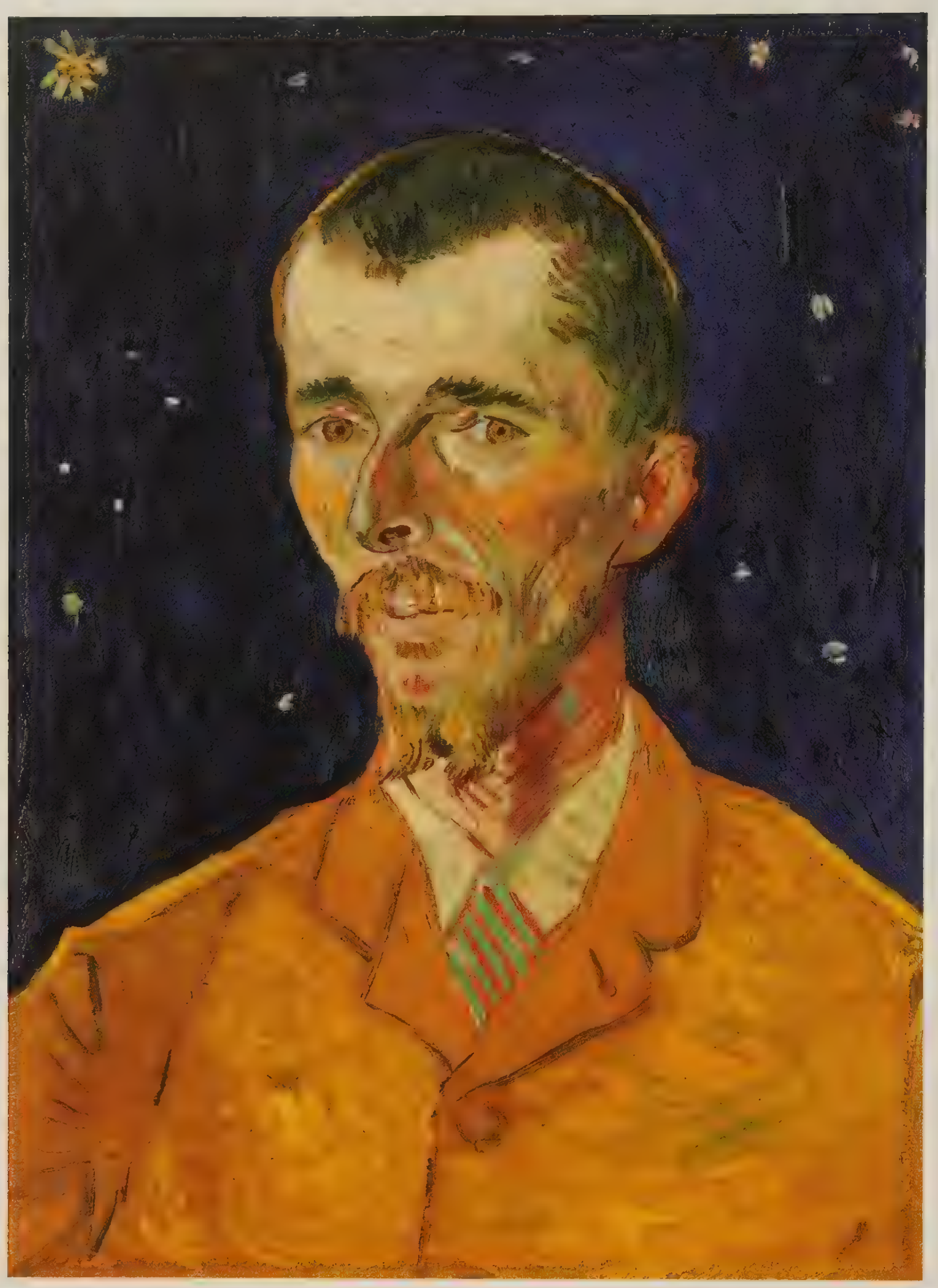


105
Armand Roulin
1888
oil on canvas
66 x 55 cm
Museum Folkwang, Essen

106
Camille Roulin
1888
oil on canvas
37 x 32 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

who had prepared the ground for Zola and Maupassant. He especially relished the impact that his subjects, his crude way of working and vulgar choice of colours, like those of 'common earthenware', would have on the over-sophisticated Parisian audience. Van Gogh wanted his portraits, like *The potato eaters* (ill. 18), to contribute to his mission to teach the art public a thing or two about the ordinary human beings one encountered in provincial life and their popular, uncomplicated tastes.

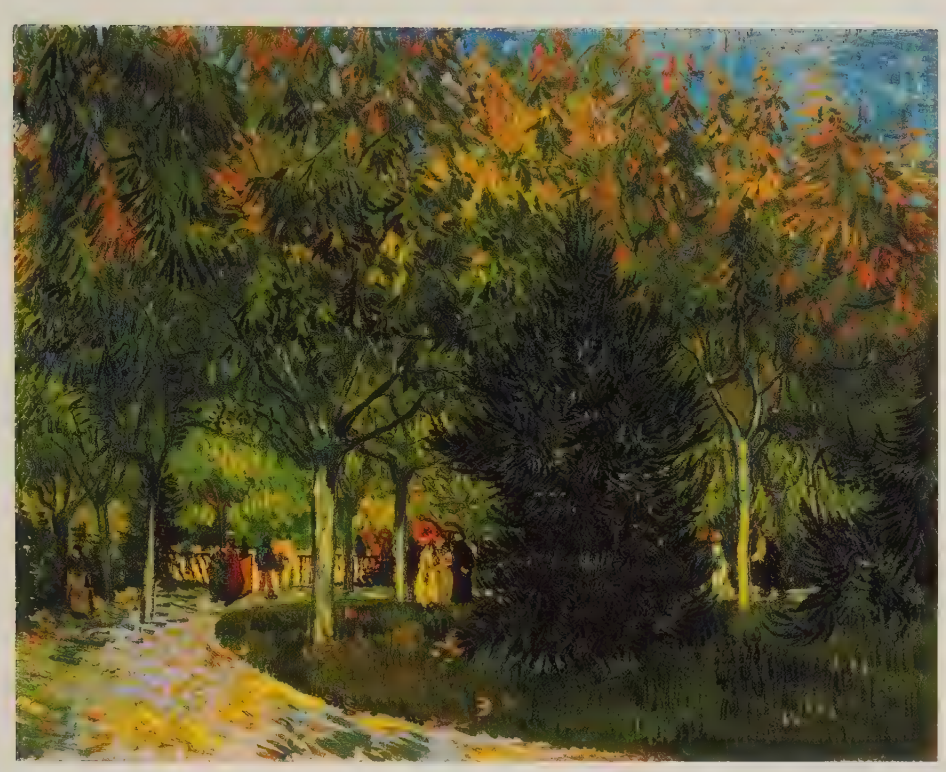
The opportunity to paint married couples or whole families had regularly been granted to Dutch seventeenth-century portraitists. Van Gogh's friendship with Roulin gave him an equivalent opportunity, which he relished. One by one, he painted every member of the postman's family, including the baby Marcelle aged just five months, setting each of them against a different plain-coloured background. His portrait of the elder son, Armand (ill. 105), effectively captures the surliness and awkwardness of the teenager; that of the younger boy, Camille (ill. 106), seen in a jaunty blue cap against



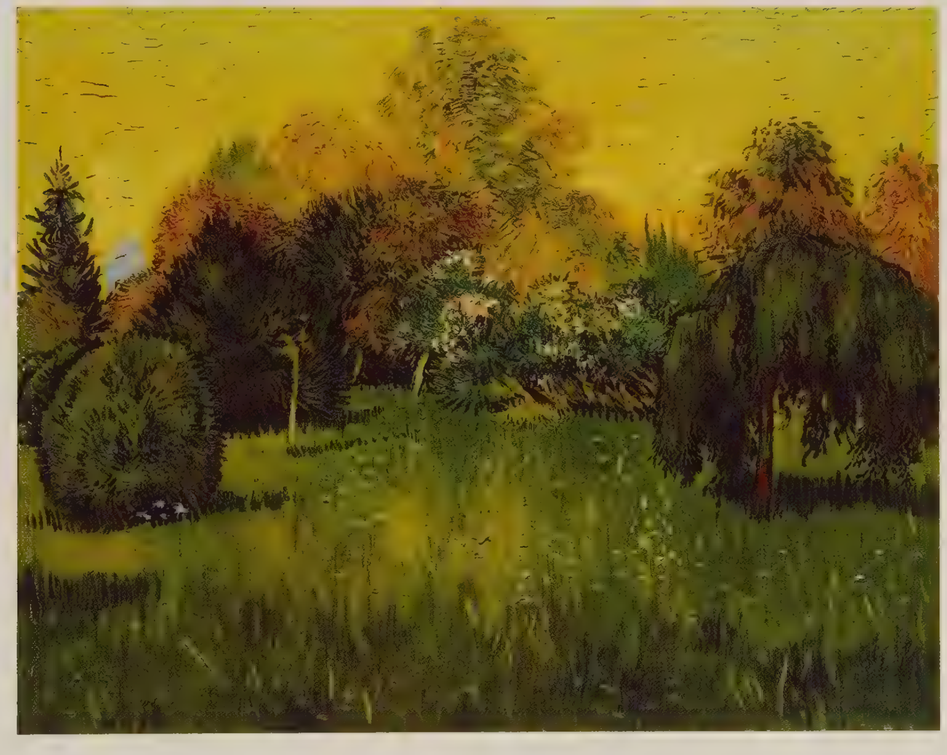
107
The poet: Eugène Boch
1888
oil on canvas
60 x 45 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

a bright yellow background, has all the cheek and wide-eyed confidence of the eleven-year-old.

In Arles Van Gogh was not entirely devoid of artistic company. In July he ran into Eugène Boch (1855-1941), a well-connected Belgian artist who was dabbling in Impressionism. Van Gogh found Boch a congenial companion, whose dreamy idealism and artistic hesitancy may have reminded him of an earlier incarnation of himself. Boch was an artist who 'dreams great dreams, who works as the nightingale sings, because it is his nature,' he told Theo. He longed for the chance to do his portrait, not only to capture his distinguished, razor-thin features but to convey these more romantic ideas in paint. To do so would require arbitrary use of colour: 'I exaggerate the fairness of the hair, I even get to orange tones, chromes, and pale

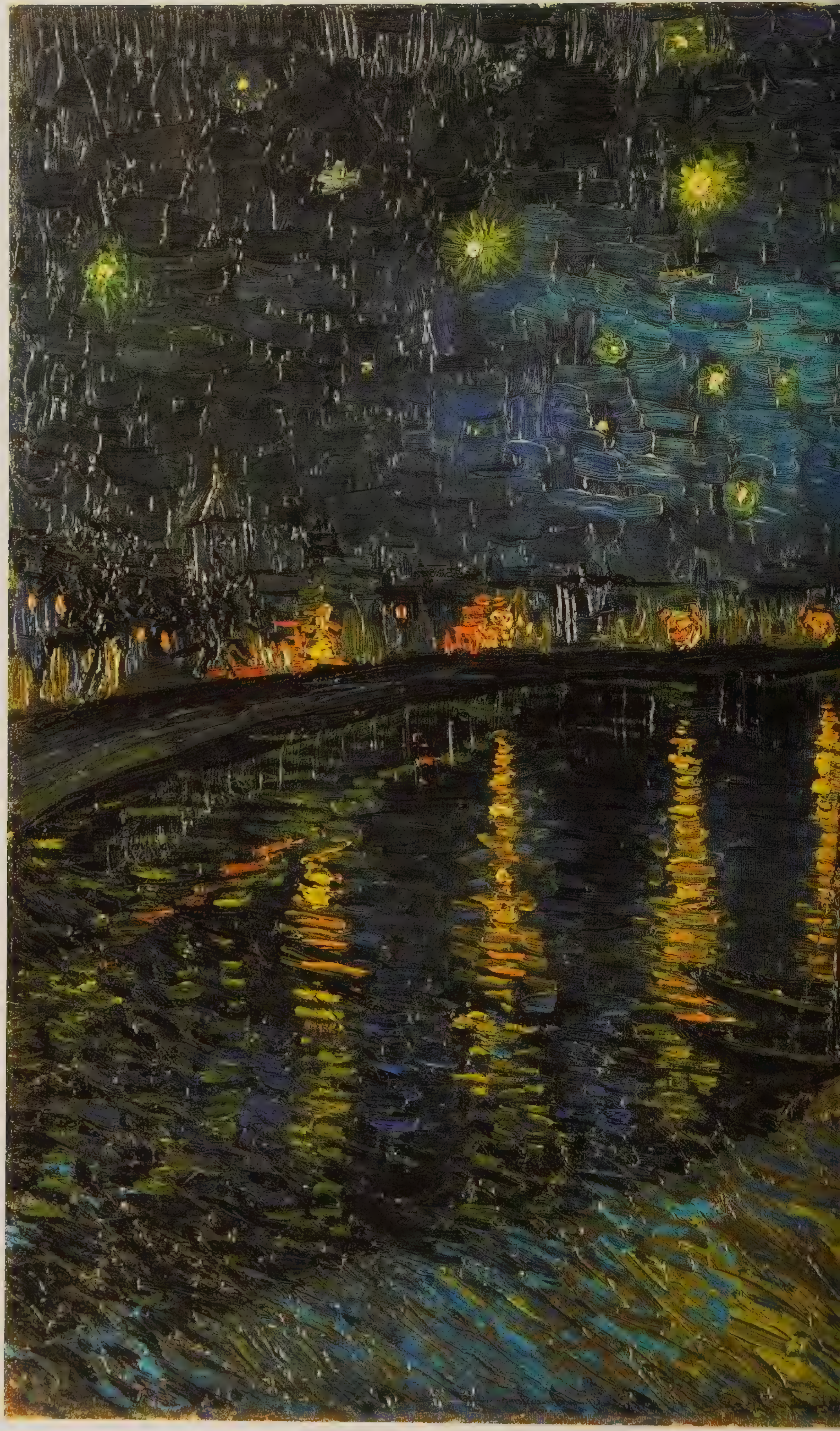


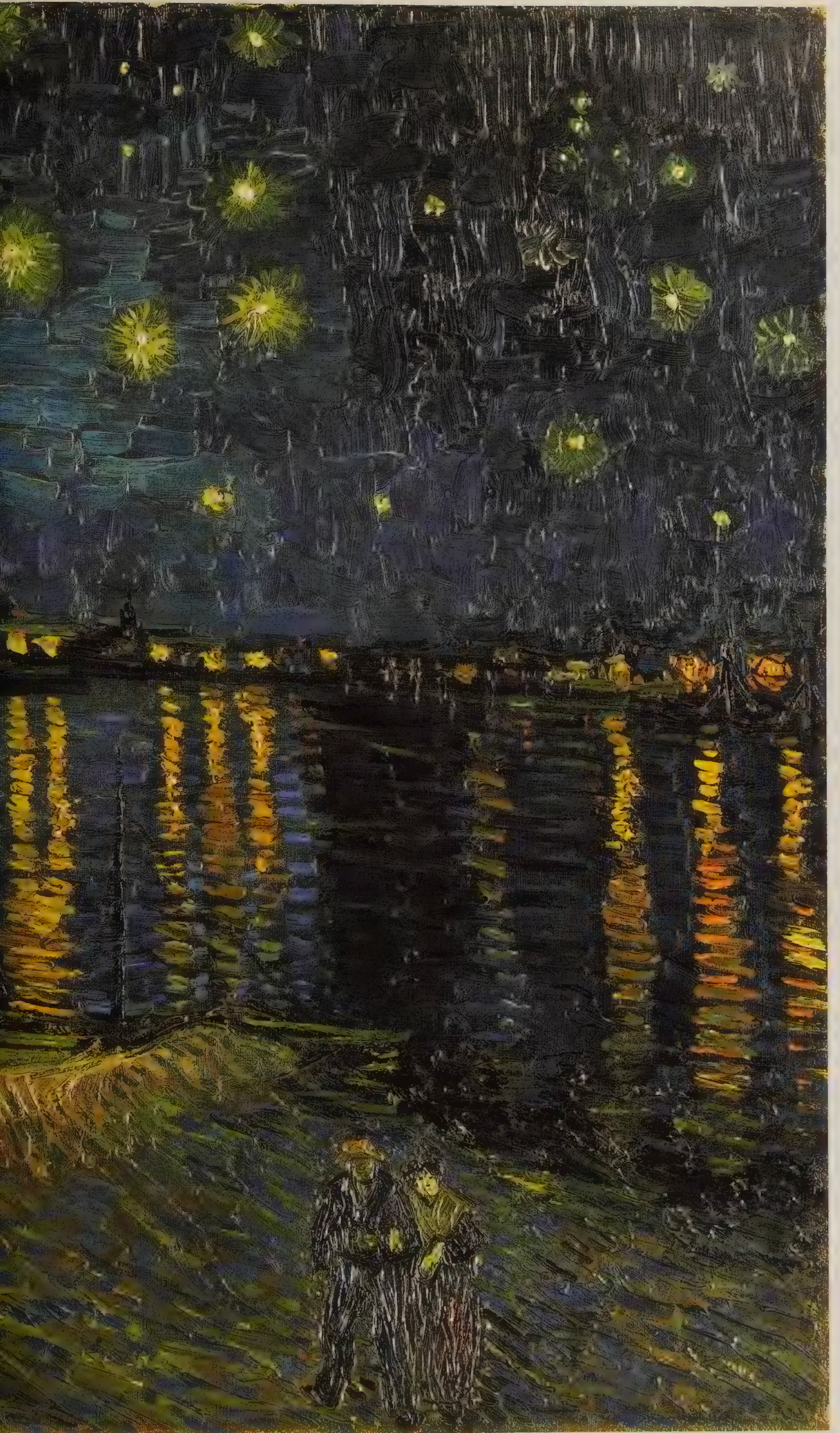
108
Path in the park
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo



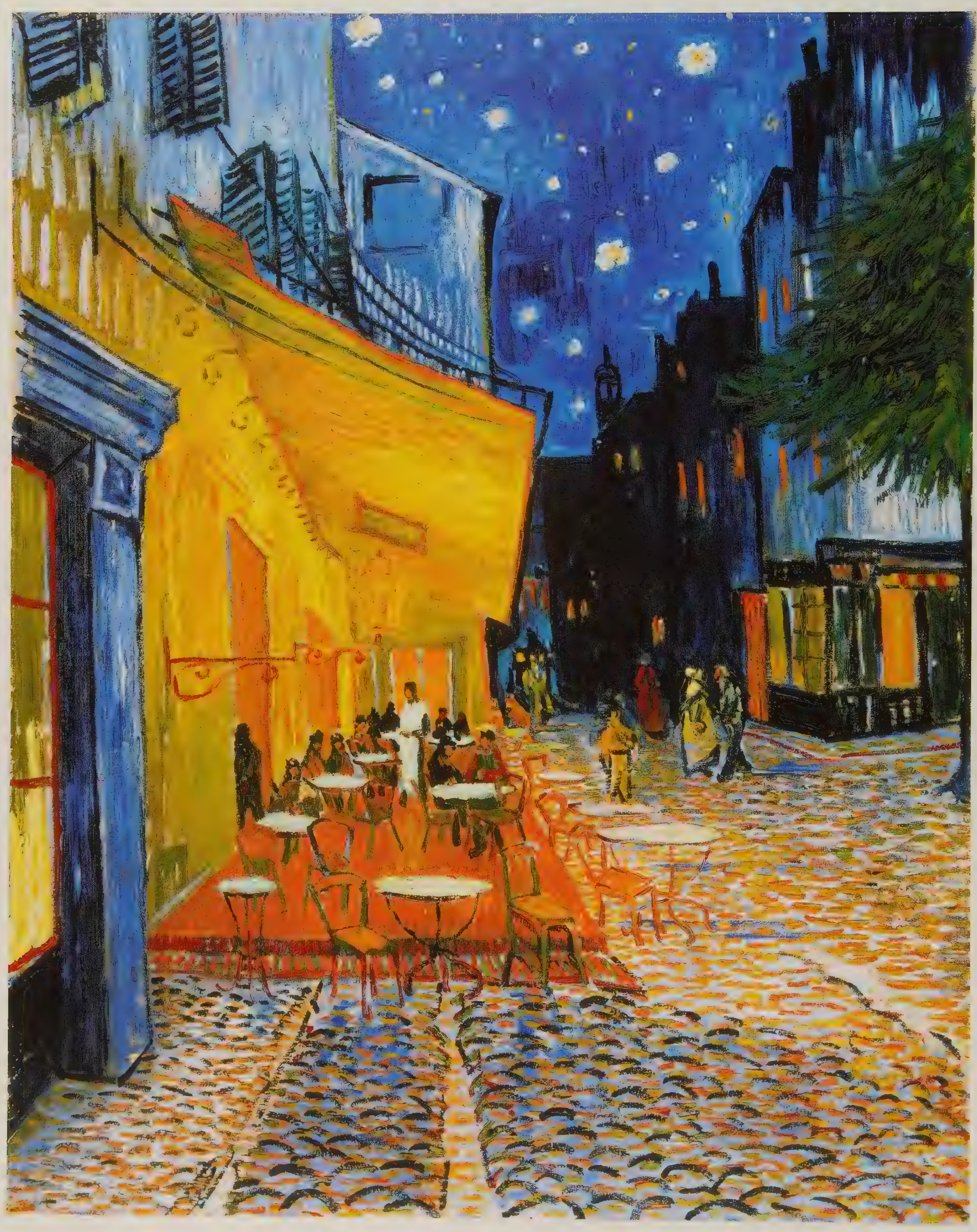
109
The poet's garden
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
The Art Institute of Chicago,
Mr. and Mrs. Lewis
Larned Coburn Memorial Collection

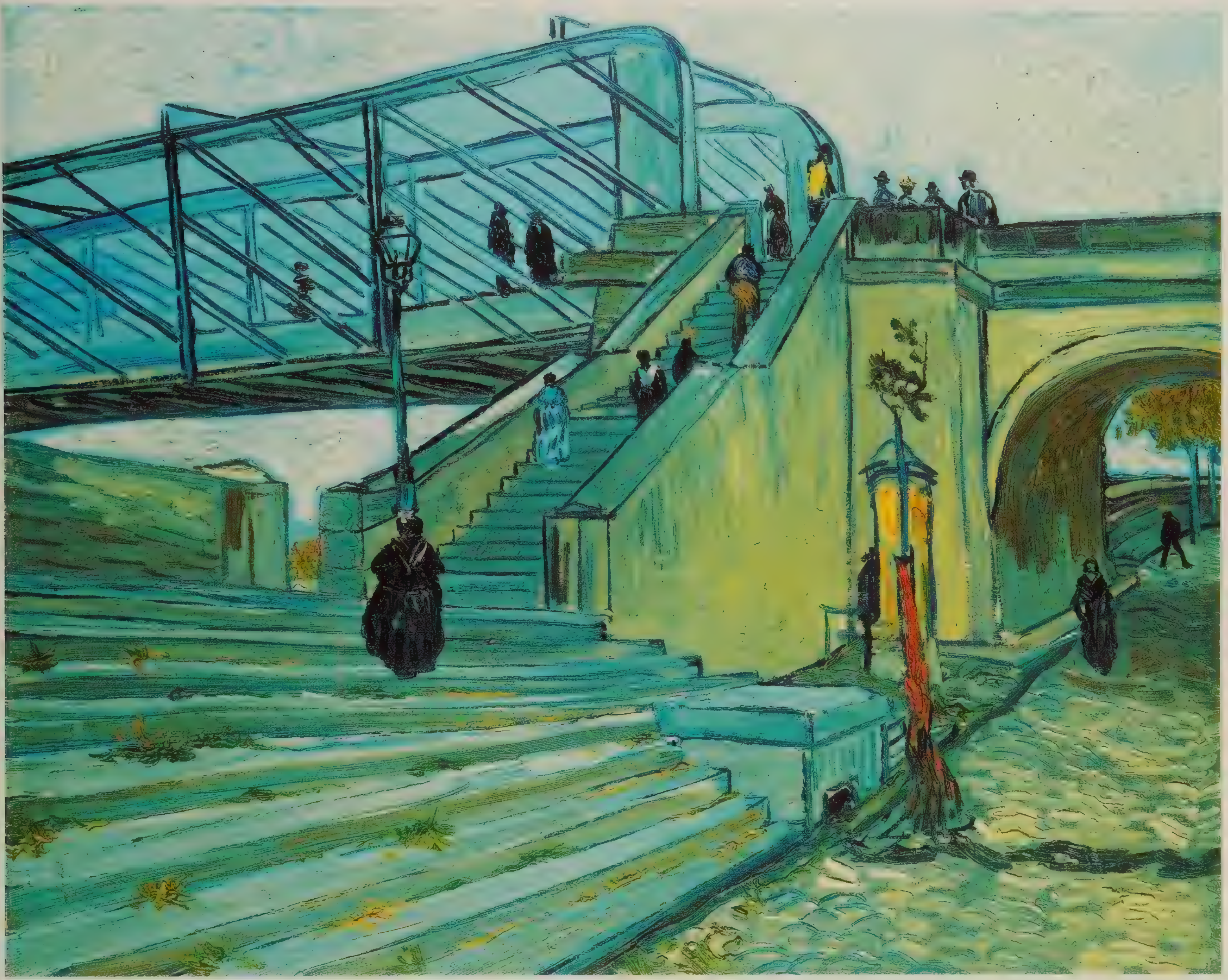
citron yellow. Behind the head, instead of painting the ordinary wall of the mean room, I paint infinity, a plain background of the richest, intensest blue that I can contrive, and by this simple combination of the bright head against the rich blue background, I get a mysterious effect, like a star in the depths of an azure sky.' [663/520] In this way, Van Gogh planned exactly how he would paint Boch a full fortnight before he was granted two sittings in a single day (ill. 107). For his part, Boch drew strength and inspiration from





110
The starry night
over the Rhône
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris



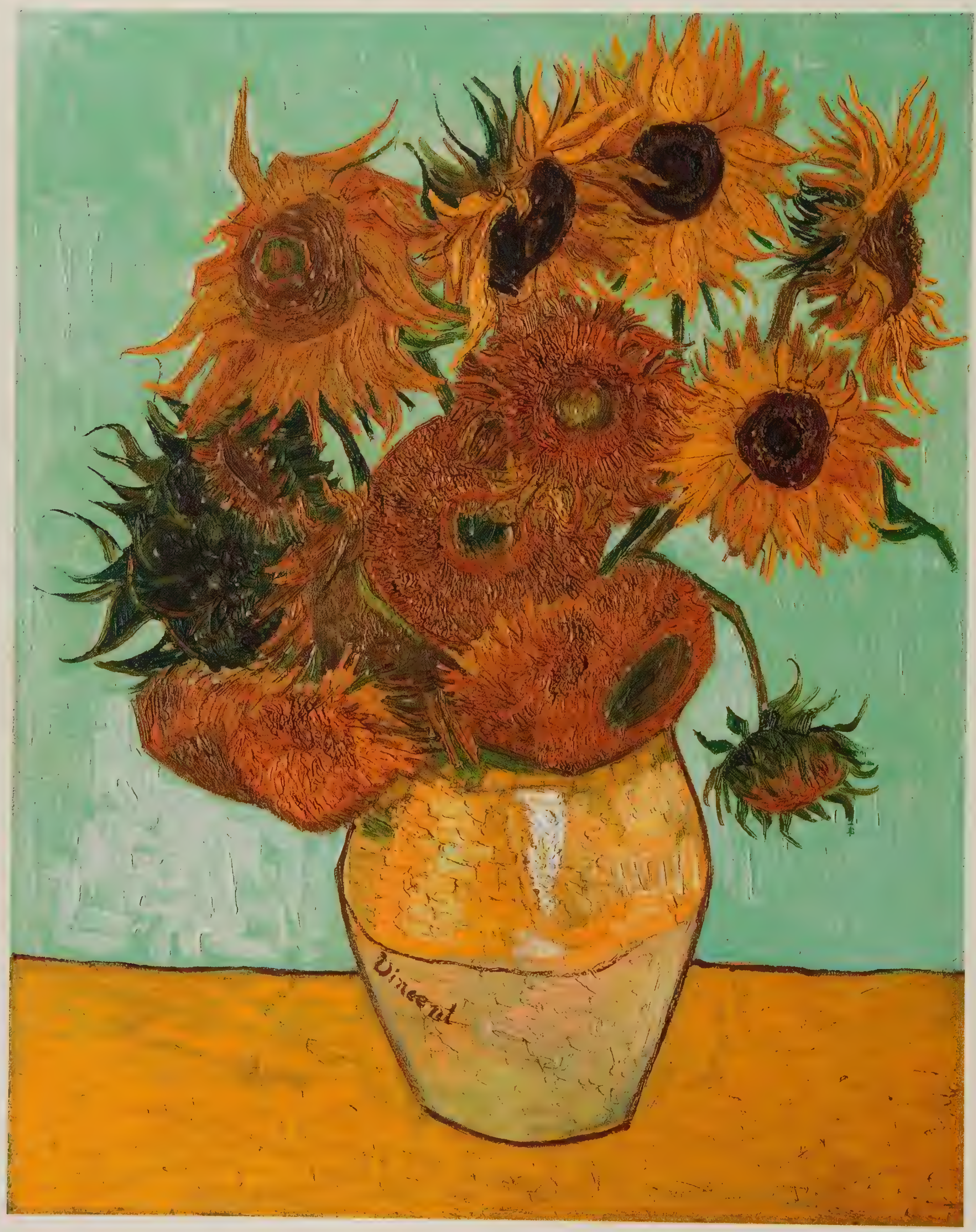


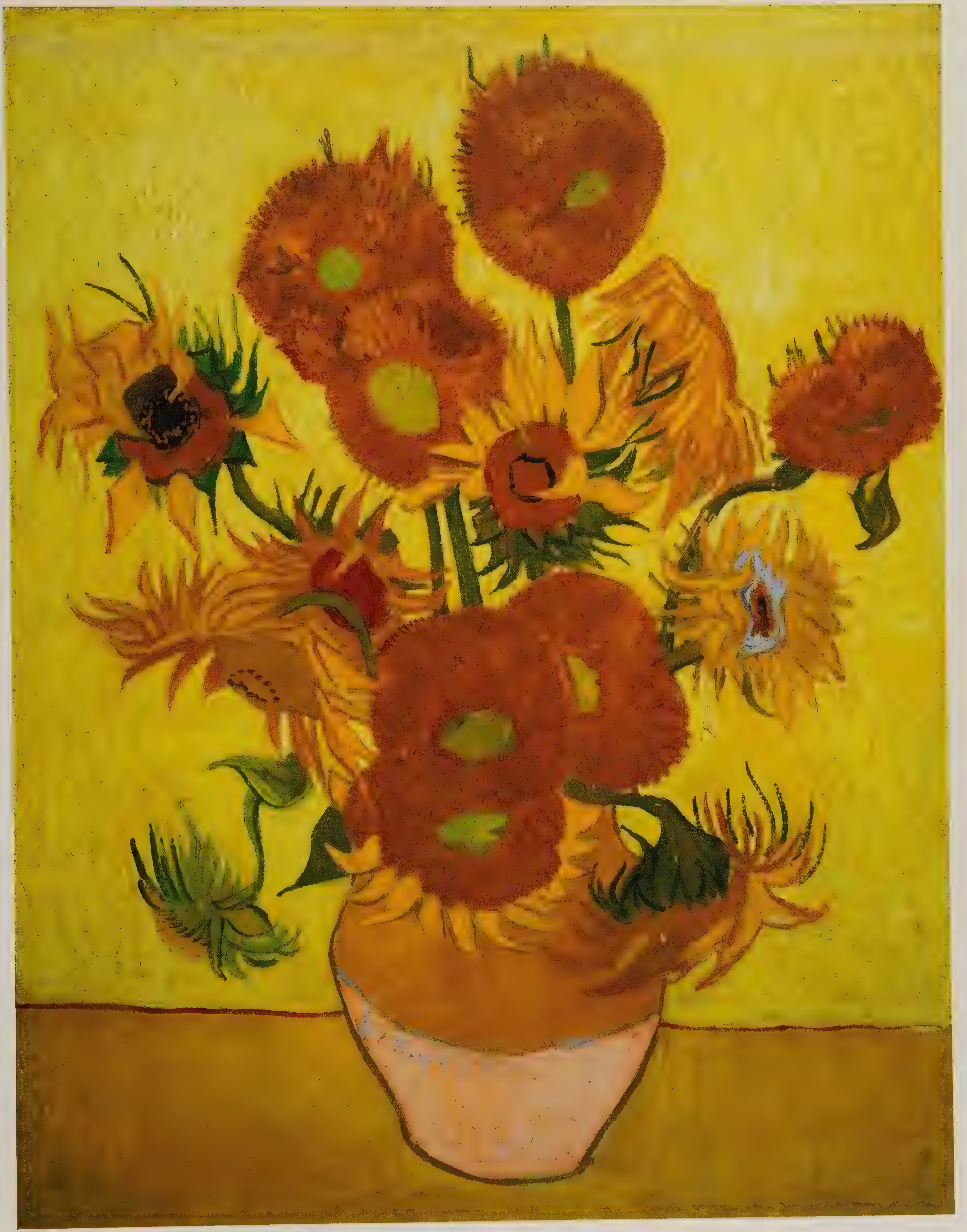
Van Gogh's enthusiasm, to the extent of taking up the latter's suggestion of returning to his native Belgium to paint the mining communities of the Borinage – subjects whose intense artistic interest Van Gogh had realised too late. For a time Boch thus played a part in Van Gogh's dream of an art that set out to reach the common man, and of a peripatetic artistic cooperative with branches to north and south.

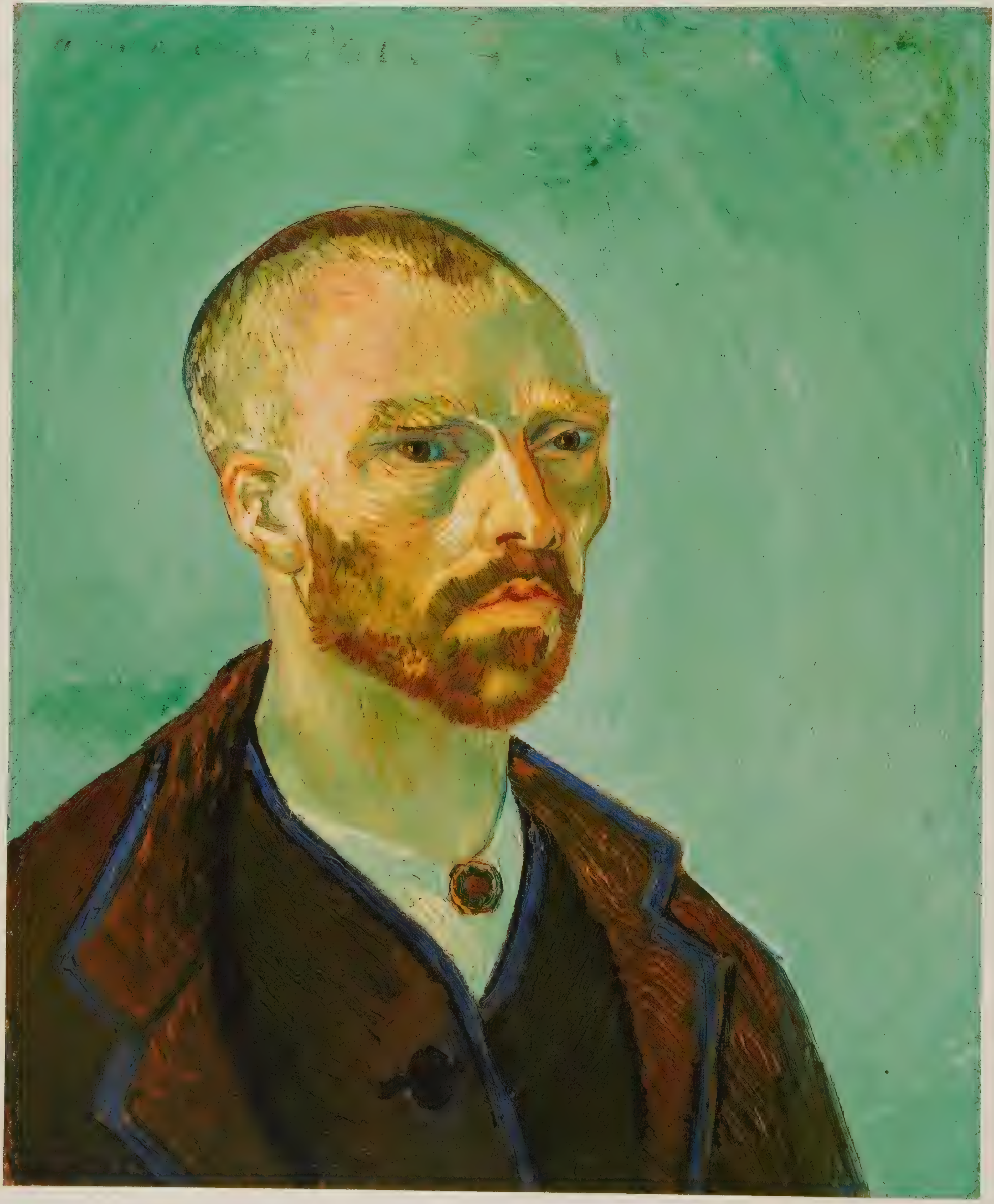
ANTICIPATING GAUGUIN'S VISIT By the end of the summer the prospect of Gauguin's accepting Vincent and Theo's standing invitation to come to Arles was becoming tangible. It undoubtedly acted as a goad on Van Gogh: he was determined to have enough good work to impress his colleague and to decorate the house in a welcoming way. This ambition led him to embark upon a new series of sunflower paintings. His idea was eventually

111
Terrace of a café at night
(Place du Forum)
1888
oil on canvas
81 x 65 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

112
The iron bridge
at Trinquetaille
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Private collection


Vincent





to complete a dozen canvases on the theme and use them to decorate the studio. It would be 'a symphony in blue and yellow'. He also grouped certain canvases to decorate Gauguin's room, categorising them so as to form a kind of sequence: two subjects inspired by what he called the 'poet's garden' (ill. 108, 109), a starry night (ill. 110), a vineyard (ill. 94), a furrowed field (ill. 93) and a view of the street (ill. 75).

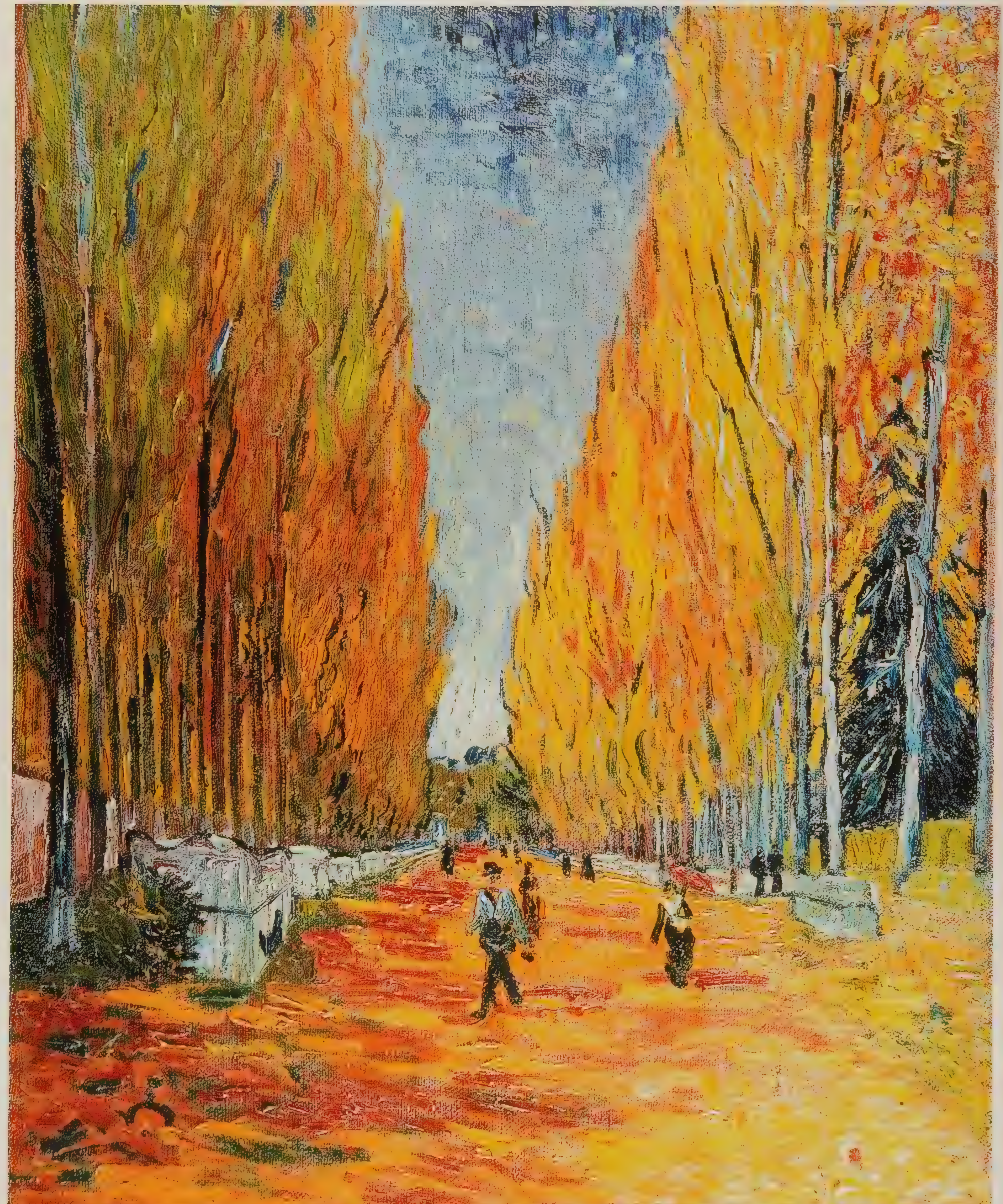
He attacked the sunflower project with gusto, up every day at dawn and working as quickly as possible in order to capture the flowers before they wilted. Indeed, this is what distinguishes this series from the highly detailed studies of desiccated sunflowers made in Paris the previous year. He completed only four canvases that August, and these were markedly different in character (one has since been destroyed). He started out with a small number of flower heads – three, then five – giving his compositions dramatic tonal contrast and rhetorical force. He then increased the numbers to twelve and fifteen in two majestic canvases, one with a blue background (ill. 113), the other with a yellow. He was all the time making calculated decisions about pictorial structure – the spiky outlines of the flowers against the plain background – and colour balancing, introducing a palette of yellows ranging from deep ochre to pale straw. In the culminating version of the theme, the subtle tonal division between table and wall echoes – and was perhaps inspired by – the two-toned Provençal pottery vase in which the heavy flowers are placed. The arrangements are such that some of the flowers have yet to come out, the petals still bright and the calyx dark in tone, while others are decidedly past their best, beginning to curl up around the edges. Van Gogh's ability to suggest ideas of burgeoning promise, plenitude and decay within this simple unified theme is one reason for the sunflower compositions' singular force. After a hiatus, Van Gogh would take up the sunflower theme again in the late autumn, completing several canvases in January 1889, by which time the sunflower season was well and truly over; the assumption must be that he worked from his previous canvases and that all are 'free' repetitions of earlier ones (ill. 114).

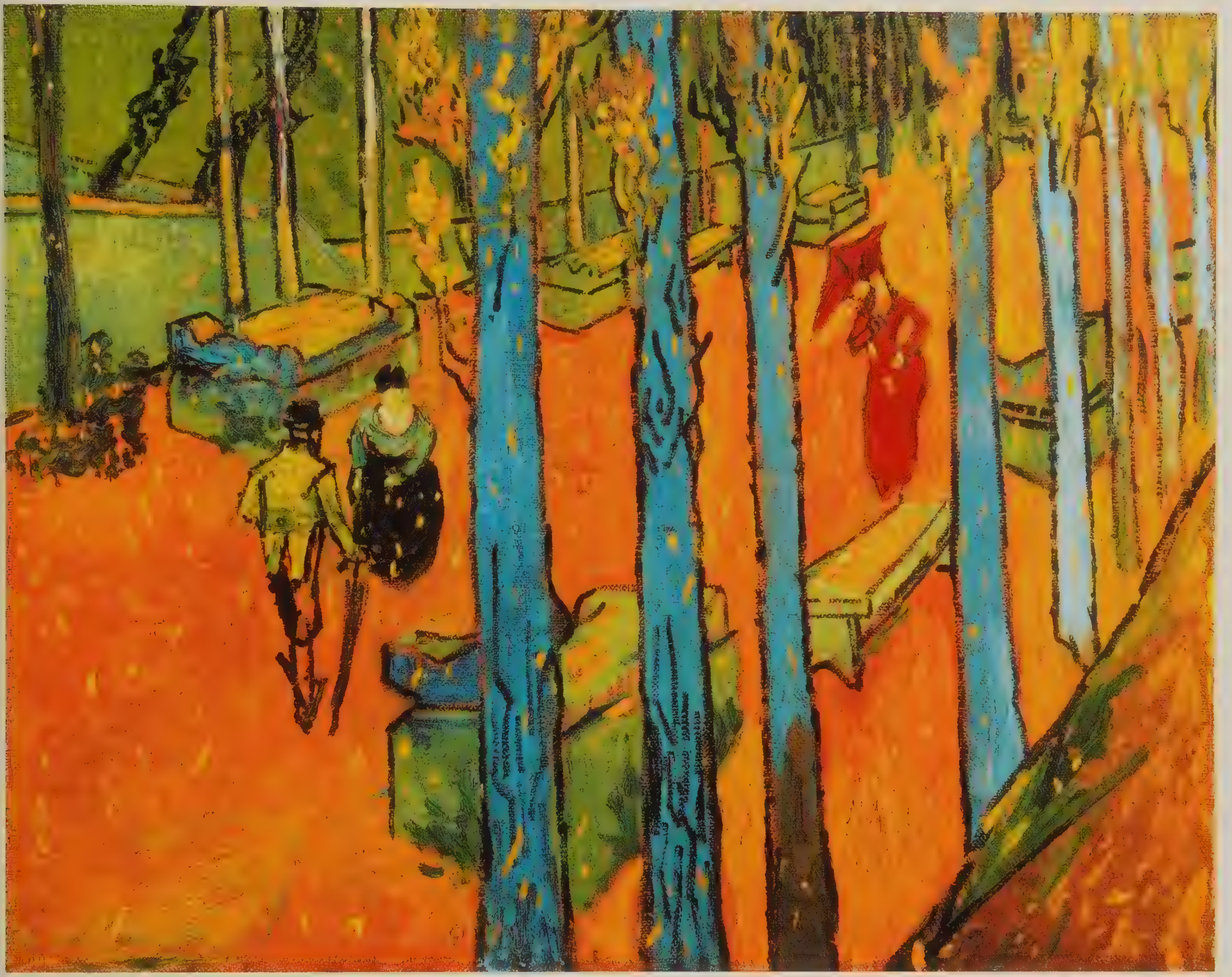
Prior to Gauguin's arrival Van Gogh sent him a self-portrait which was intended to convey not only his own appearance but the look of 'an impressionist in general' (ill. 115). In it, pursuing his identification with Japan, he had adopted the shaven-headed guise of a bonze, 'a simple worshipper of the eternal Buddha' [701/545]. Van Gogh was well aware that his own essentially analytical approach to nature was quite different from that of Gauguin, who was an altogether more synthetic and ruminative artist, possessed of a more abstract vision. Faced with Gauguin's description of his recent painting *Vision of the sermon*, a startling departure from reality painted in a cloisonist style and intended to convey a symbolic religious meaning, Van Gogh was already nervous about this difference.

< 113
Sunflowers
1888
oil on canvas
91 x 71 cm
Bayerische
Staatsgemäldesammlungen,
Munich

< 114
Sunflowers
1889
oil on canvas
95 x 73 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

115
Self-portrait as bonze
1888
oil on canvas
59 x 48 cm
Fogg Art Museum,
Harvard University,
Cambridge, Mass.



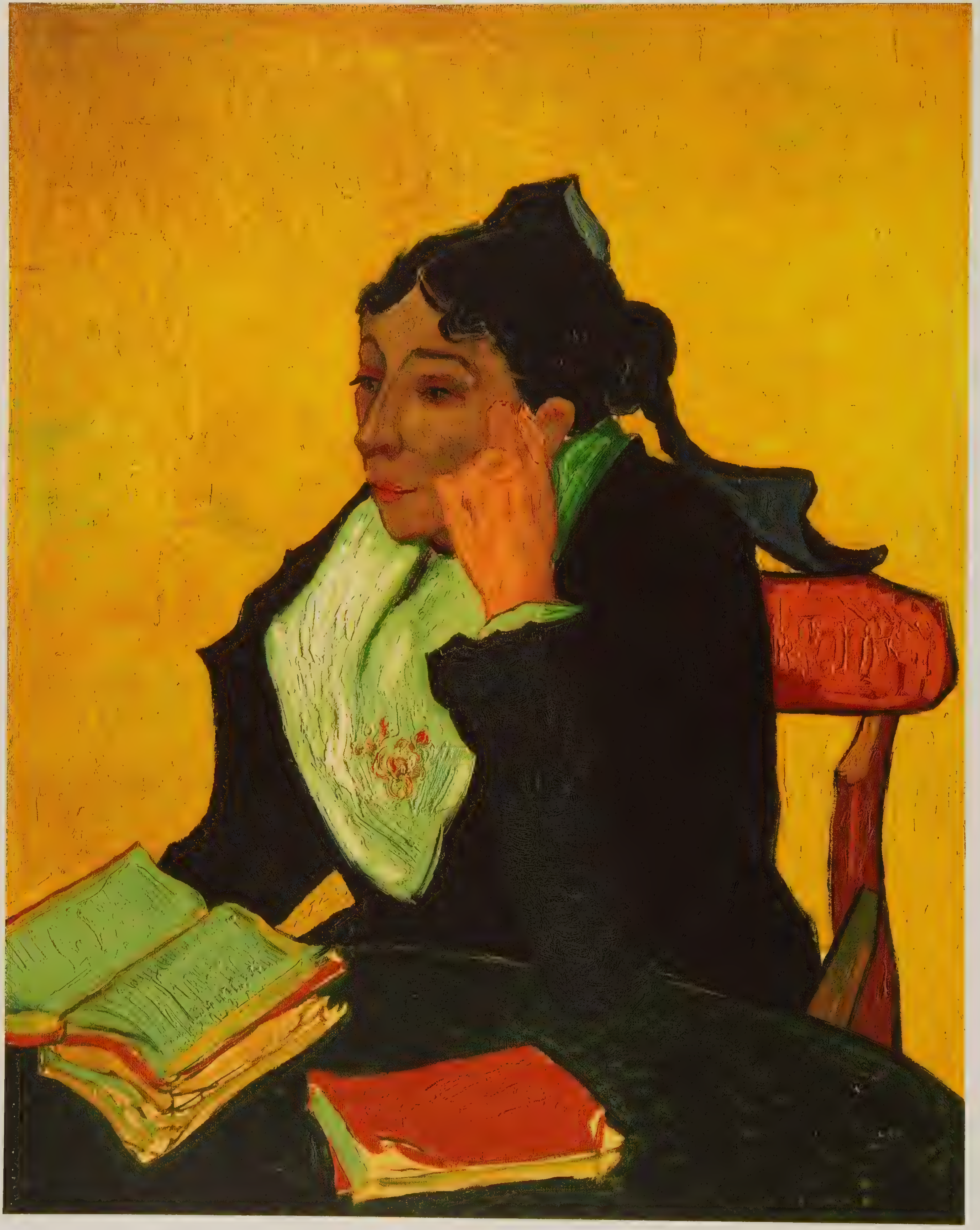


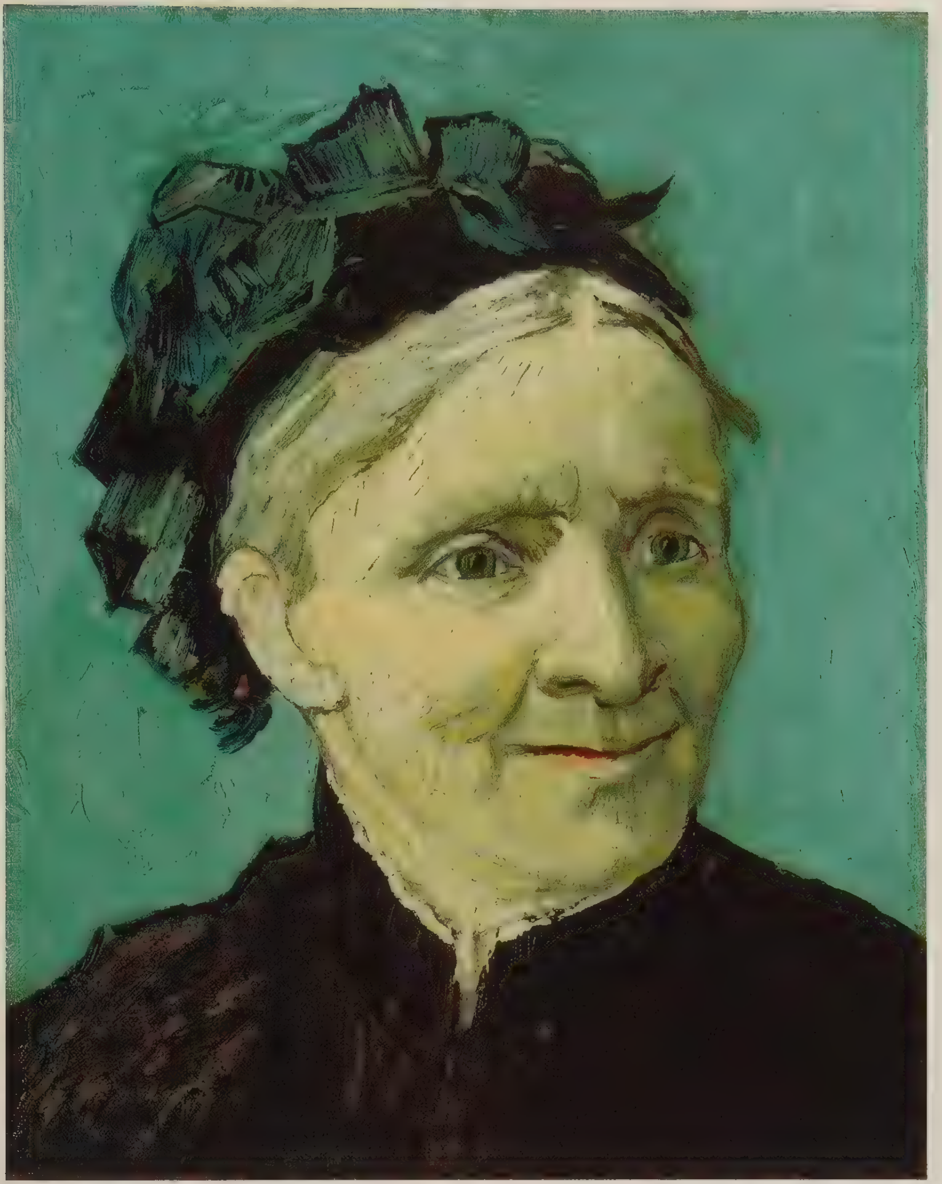
Working from nature was an article of faith with him, as he confessed in a letter to Bernard just before Gauguin's arrival: 'I cannot work without a model. [. . .] Others may have more lucidity than I do in the matter of abstract studies, and it is certainly possible that you are one of their number, Gauguin too [. . .] and perhaps I myself when I am old. But in the meantime I am still feeding on nature. I exaggerate, sometimes I make changes in a motif; but for all that, I do not invent the whole picture; on the contrary, I find it all ready in nature, only it must be disentangled.' [702/B19]

116
Les Alyscamps
1888
oil on canvas
89 x 72 cm
Private collection

117
Falling leaves
(Les Alyscamps)
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

THE STUDIO OF THE SOUTH For all that he had longed for this collaboration, Van Gogh found working with Gauguin in the autumn of 1888 taxing, and it induced some loss of confidence on his part. The two artists were

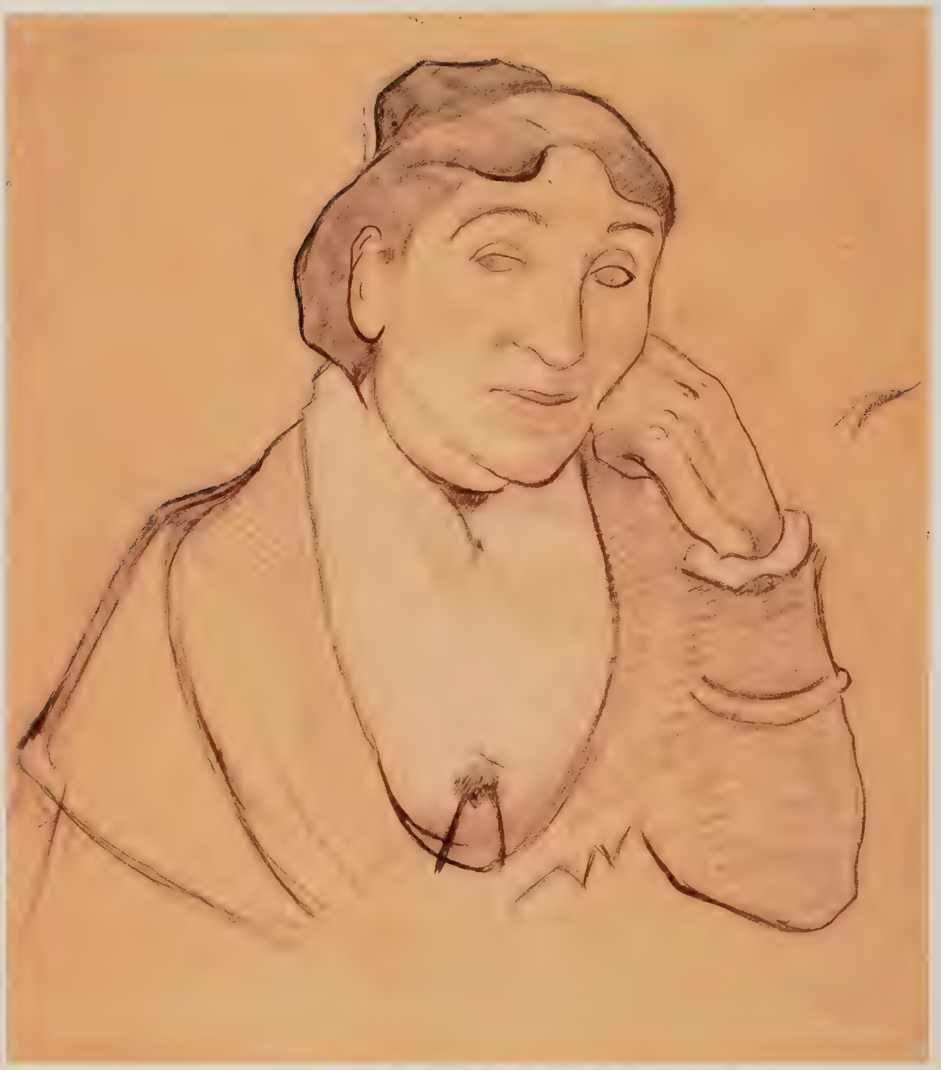




118
L'Arlésienne
1888
oil on canvas
91 x 73 cm
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York

119
Portrait of the artist's mother
1888
oil on canvas
39 x 31 cm
Norton Simon Art Foundation,
Pasadena, California

close in age, experience, ambition and, above all, desperation: Van Gogh recognised in Gauguin a fellow traveller through life, one who had courageously, or recklessly, severed his ties with family and convention and was now, to a similar degree, suffering for the sake of his art. The sequence of letters over the summer months between all the parties concerned reveals a complex courtship ritual, in which flattery alternated with hard-headed practicality. Emile Bernard was a not insignificant or disinterested player on the sidelines. Gauguin, for his part, was loath to leave Brittany, for there his work had at last been fulfilling its promise. What drew him south was Theo van Gogh's offer of regular financial support in return for regular consignments of pictures and for keeping his brother company. But Van Gogh undoubtedly romanticised Gauguin and the role he would play, urging him to think of himself as the poet of Arles, the heir to Boccaccio and Petrarch, the master of the 'studio of the south' – indeed Van Gogh's whole



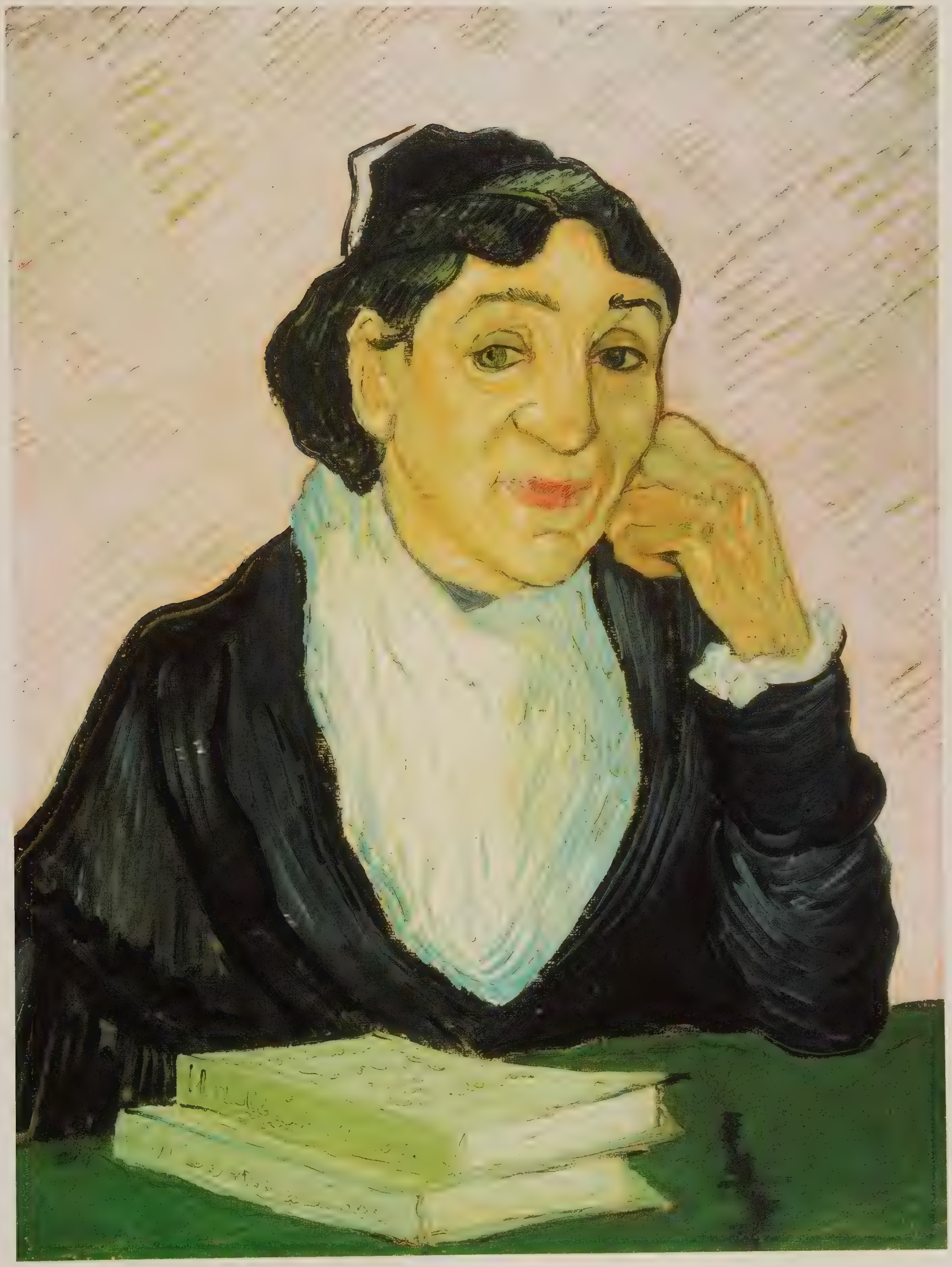
120
Paul Gauguin
L'Arlésienne, Mme Ginoux
1888
white and coloured chalks and charcoal
56.1 x 49.2 cm
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Memorial gift from Dr. T. Edward and Tullah Hanley

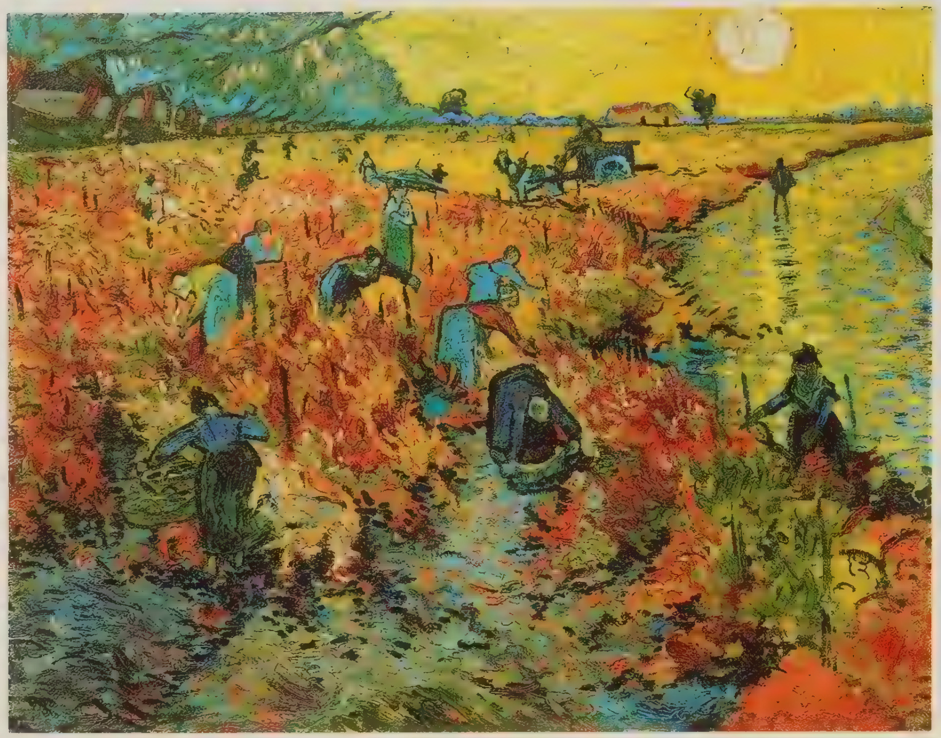
121
L'Arlésienne (Portrait of Madame Ginoux)
1890
oil on canvas
65 x 49 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

sequence of paintings recasting the public park in the Place Lamartine as a 'poet's garden', played to this notion (ill. 108, 109). So when Gauguin finally got to Arles on 23 October, he not unreasonably assumed his allotted role as head of the studio and duly took it upon himself to behave accordingly.

The essential differences between Van Gogh and Gauguin as artists, previously anticipated, quickly surfaced during their time together. For the more cerebral Gauguin, ideas for pictures took time to coalesce, and he needed to familiarise himself slowly with any new environment. Nor did he refrain from making disapproving comments about the Dutchman's more frenetic rate of production. Van Gogh made some adjustments to his way of applying paint during Gauguin's stay, experimenting, in *Dance hall at Arles* (ill. 123), for instance, with the flatter colour and emphatic cloisonist black outlining Bernard and Gauguin had been using in Brittany.

In order to save money, Gauguin purchased a large roll of jute, a coarse canvas that they could cut to size and stretch themselves. However, this type





122
Red vineyard at Montmajour
1888
oil on canvas
75 x 93 cm
Pushkin Museum,
Moscow

of support assumed a relatively lean method of paint application that allowed the pigment to seep into the ground, like Gauguin's own (ill. 125, 126); it was arguably less suited to Van Gogh's extravagantly textural paint application, in which the brushwork stood out from the canvas surface.

There was some agreement over questions of colour. Both considered it an expressive weapon in the painter's armoury, one that should be used without fear of exaggeration. But about drawing they were at their most divergent. Gauguin had evolved a pondered and elegant synthetic style of drawing that bound forms within controlled contours. Drawings were the crucibles for his compositional ideas. Van Gogh's drawing involved textural detail, and he often built up forms from the inside out, in a series of radiating curves, as though to approximate the inner vibration or life force that he felt infused everything in nature. These stark dissimilarities were mirrored in their different tastes in art; although they agreed on the merits of Millet and Delacroix, Gauguin's admiration tended always towards the classical tradition and such cool-headed draughtsmen as Raphael, Ingres and Degas, whereas Van Gogh was more enthused by romantic, painterly artists such as Daumier (1808-1879), Ziem (1821-1911), Rousseau (1812-1867) and Monticelli.

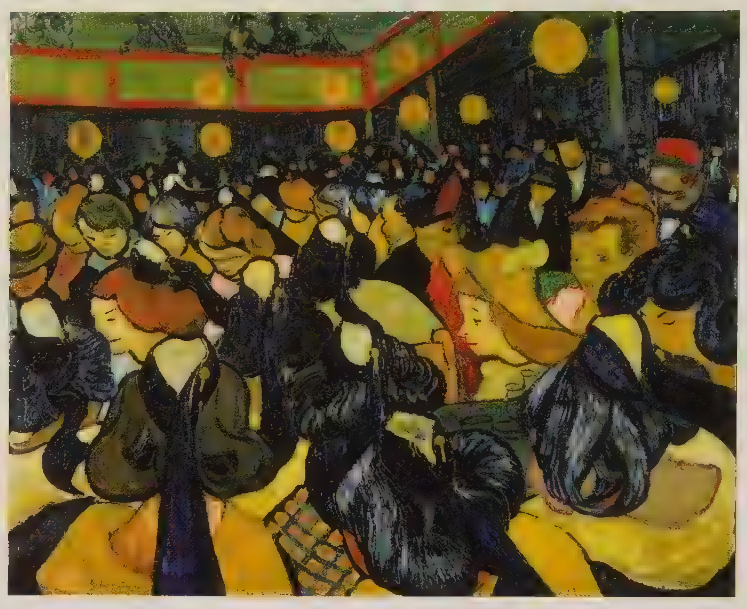
The question of 'abstract' canvases undoubtedly fuelled their discussions. As Gauguin's presence made him acutely conscious, Van Gogh drew his inspiration directly from his surroundings. While his flower paintings were undoubtedly forceful and made a powerful impression on Gauguin (as Van Gogh had intended they should) – interestingly, Gauguin declined to venture onto this territory while in Arles – his landscapes often featured unprepossessing workaday motifs: the café, the public garden, dockers and barges on the Rhône, railway carriages, bridges, roads and telegraph poles (ill. 75, 78, 111, 112). Gauguin, now thoroughly imbued with the archaic romance and spiritual atmosphere of Brittany, had little interest in this sort of urban modernity. It smacked of the Neo-Impressionists, whose work he had come to despise. He seems to have urged Van Gogh to turn his attention instead to Arles's historic sites. The Alyscamps, a tree-lined avenue punctuated with Roman tombs, was one of the few sites where they worked together, both painting autumnal views. In his first attempt at the subject, Van Gogh's approach was analytical; his attention even strayed to the neighbouring railway works (ill. 116). In subsequent efforts his rendering became more obviously stylised in a Japanese manner (ill. 117). In general, Gauguin's interpretations of the same motif were more refined and delicate, but less forceful. Within the genre of portraiture there were some constructive exchanges. Both of them worked on portraits of Mme Ginoux, the proprietress of the Café de la Gare, in her Arlésienne costume (ill. 118, 120). Gauguin's highly synthetic drawing of her, which remained in Van Gogh's possession, would later give rise to several painted variants on Van Gogh's part (ill. 121).

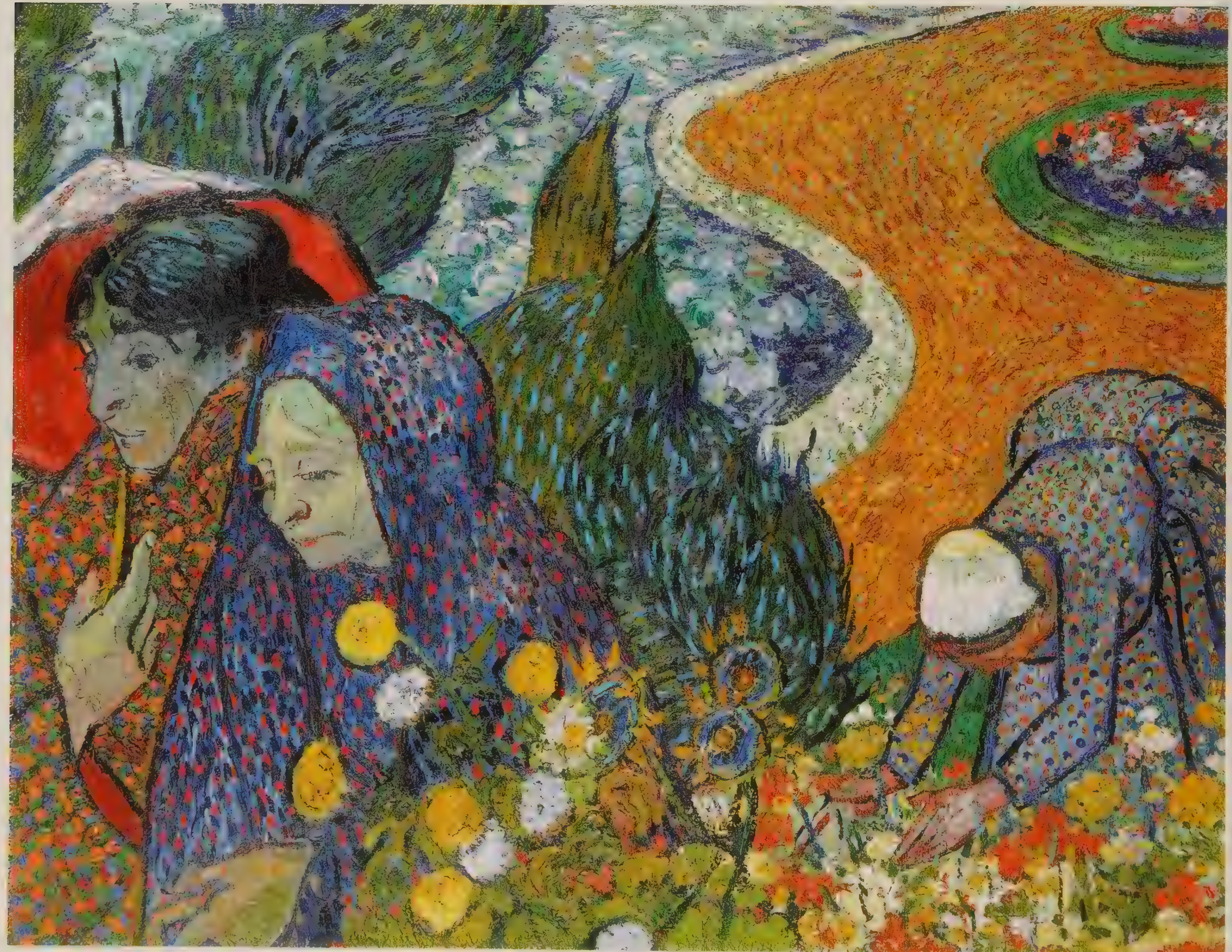
But Gauguin was not content for long to explore such realistic motifs. Having just begun in Brittany to paint wholly imaginary subjects, he wanted to investigate the resources of his imagination further. As though to demonstrate how little he felt constrained by place and time, he painted a grape harvest scene (ill. 125), which, unlike Van Gogh's version of the subject (ill. 122), paid scant attention to the actual appearance of the vines. At the centre he placed an abandoned, desolate woman watched over by a strange hooded figure in black, while two stooping women in Breton costume make a show of working. It was, he felt, his best canvas to date. Van Gogh clearly felt pressured by Gauguin's example to try a new way of approaching a subject he had tackled many times. His final view of the Place Lamartine was done largely from the imagination; it incorporates the figures of his mother and sister walking in the rectory garden at Etten (ill. 124). But he later denounced this way of working, saying that such departures into the realm of the imagination were beyond his grasp and dangerous for his sanity.

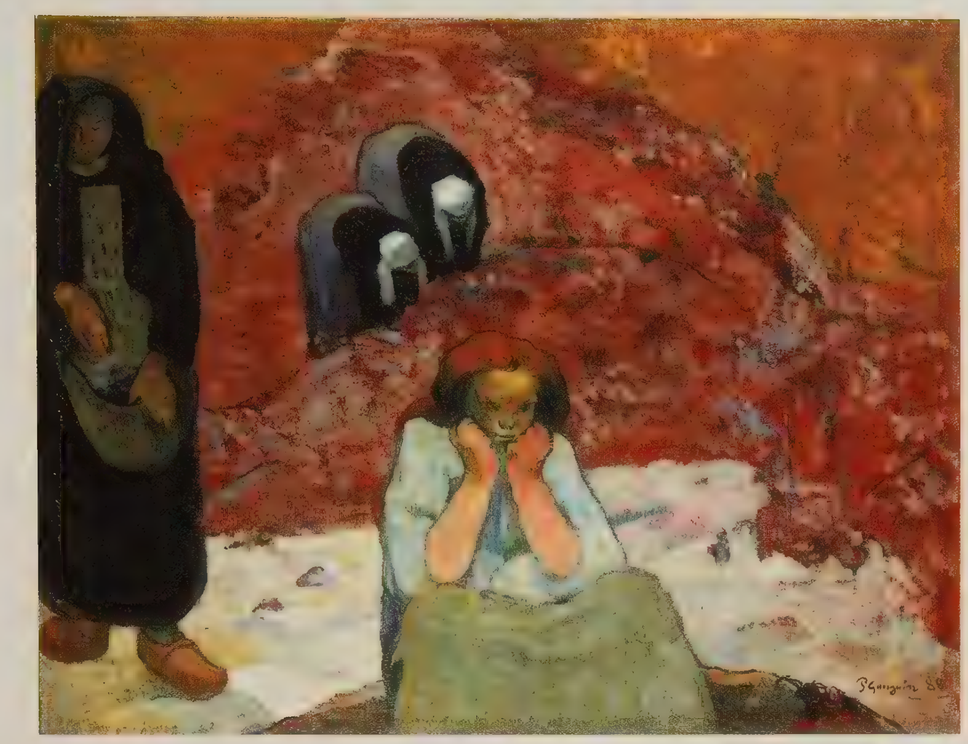
If, on the surface, Gauguin seemed to be emerging victorious from this jousting of two strong egos, he quickly sensed that relations were becoming dangerously strained and started to plan an exit strategy. Yet he could scarcely have foreseen the actual outcome. On the night of 23-24 December, following a drunken argument, Van Gogh suffered some sort of mental breakdown; he seems to have come towards Gauguin with a razor, but, when challenged, he fled, turned the weapon on himself and severed the lobe of

123
Dance hall at Arles
1888
oil on canvas
65 x 81 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

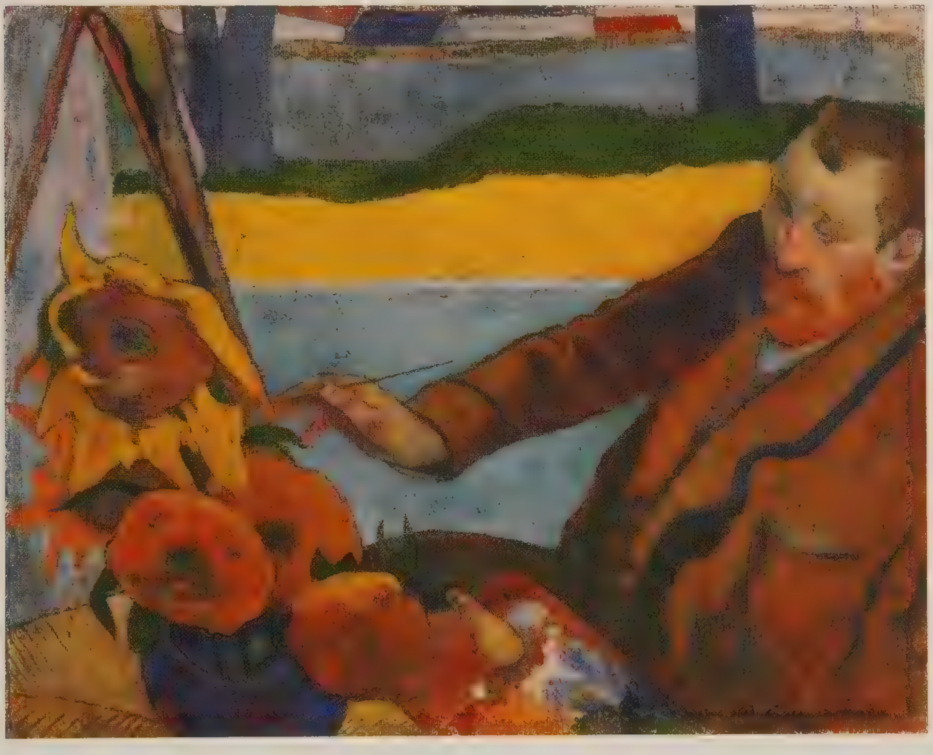
124
Memory of the garden at Etten
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
The State Hermitage Museum,
St Petersburg







125
Paul Gauguin
Human miseries
(The grape harvest)
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Ordrupgaard,
Copenhagen



126
Paul Gauguin
Portrait of Van Gogh
painting sunflowers
1888
oil on canvas
73 x 91 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

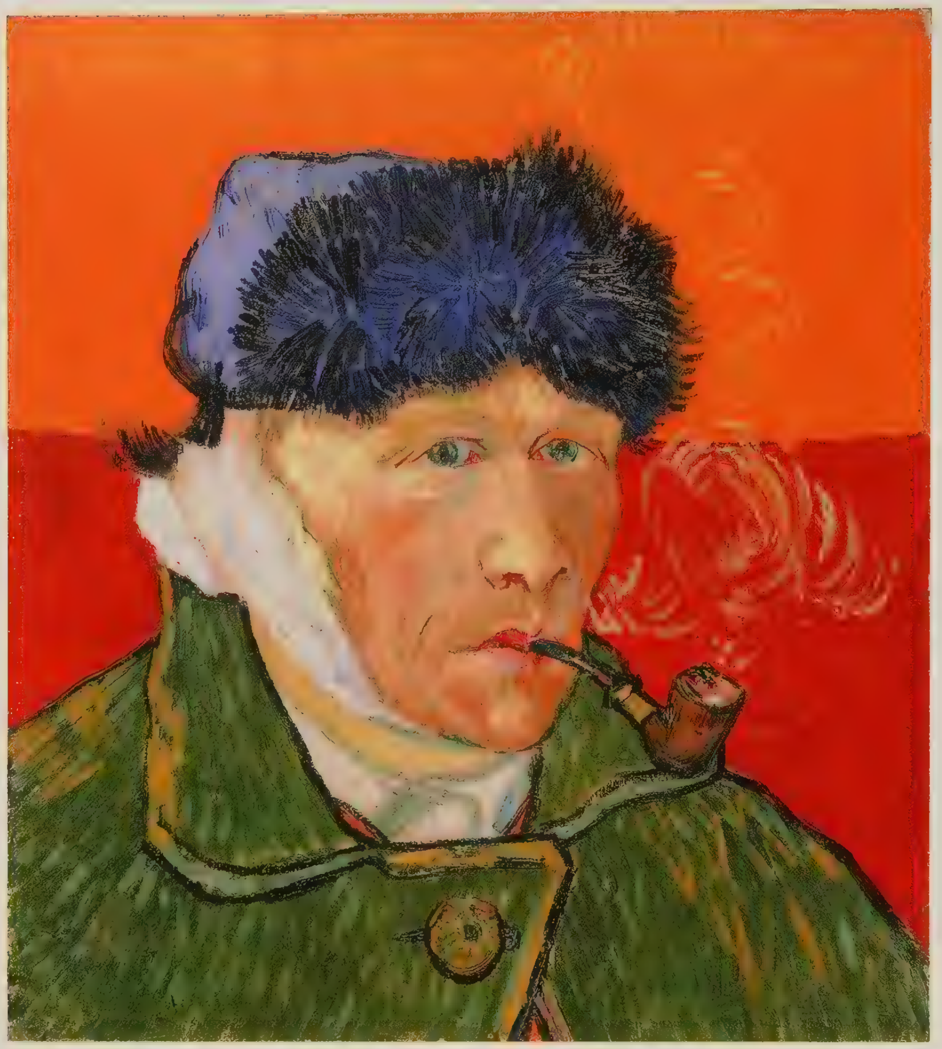
his left ear. Theo was called from Paris, and Vincent was hospitalised. Once it became clear that his life was not in danger, Gauguin returned to Paris with Theo. Thus was Van Gogh's hard-won momentum as an artist abruptly curtailed by his first severe mental breakdown, and his dreams for the convivial studio of the south were severely compromised by the onset of a debilitating disease.

1889–1890

Arles, Saint-Rémy and Auvers-sur-Oise

Art as consolation

IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH of his attack Van Gogh must have momentarily doubted his ability to continue painting. However, a number of factors helped to keep him to his chosen path over the coming year: the encouragement of the artists with whom he had engaged in mutual exchanges; the confirmation of his talent from people he did not know personally, especially two Dutchmen, J. J. Isaacson and Meyer de Haan, who had recently stayed with Theo in Paris and admired his work; the interest shown in him by certain critics; and the beginnings of a sense that he had built up a body of work that was fit to exhibit. 1889 – the year of the centennial Paris Universal Exhibition – was the year Van Gogh had targeted as an opportunity for this.

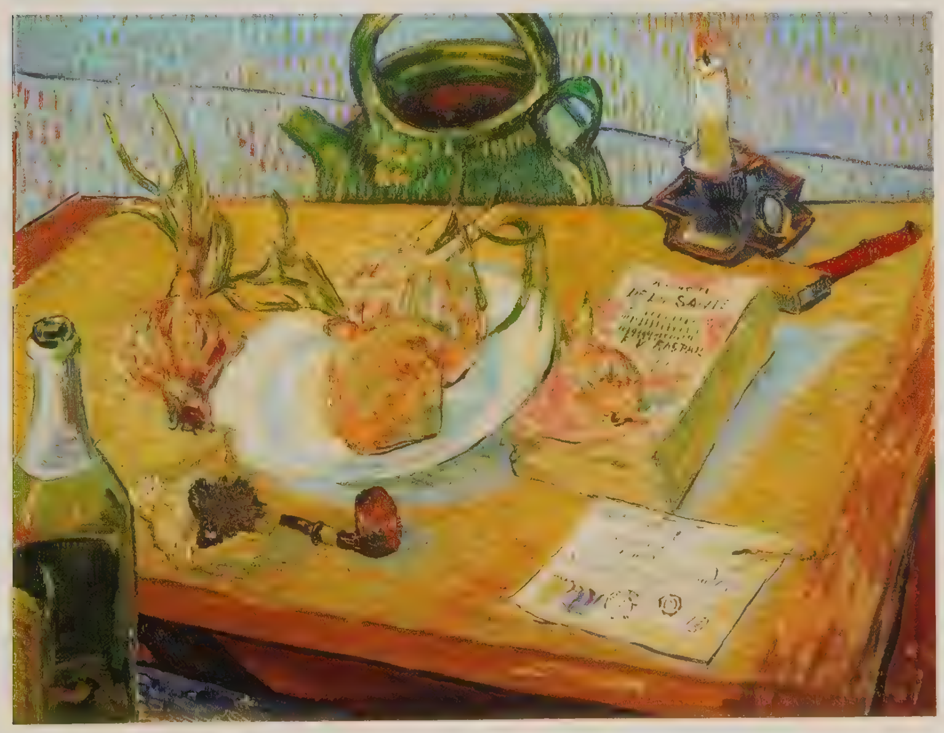


127
Self-portrait with bandaged ear
1889
oil on canvas
51 x 45 cm
Private collection

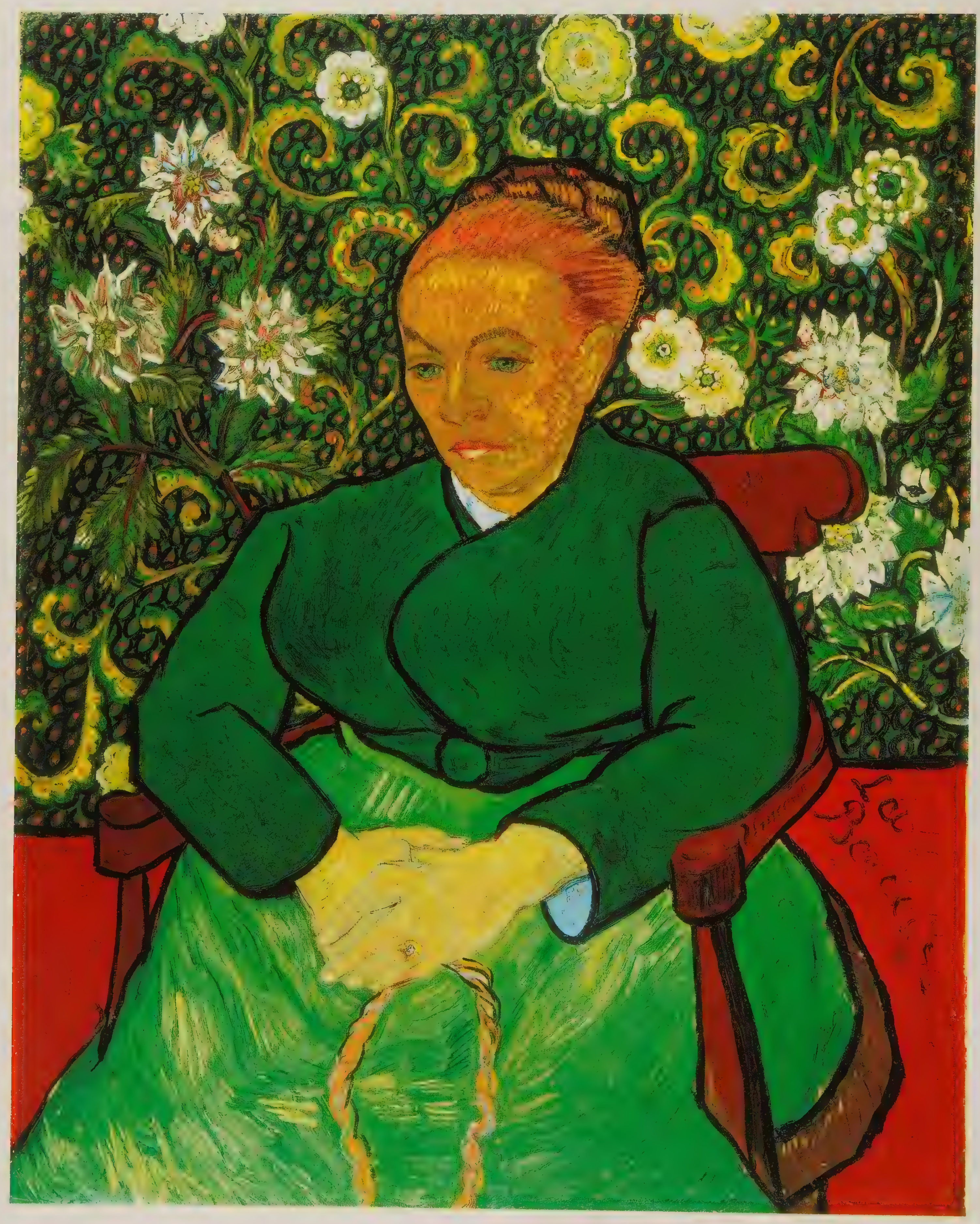
But he was now beset by a new fear, of the unpredictable but inevitable recurrence of his illness. (Medical opinion remains divided about the precise nature of Van Gogh's illness – it seems probable that it was a form of temporal lobe epilepsy, complicated by a bipolar affective disorder – although there is little doubt that his alcohol consumption and poor diet exacerbated his condition.) In these circumstances, he felt the need to work all the more intensely, comparing himself to a coalminer threatened at any moment with a pit accident that might result in injury or death. Paralysing though the attacks were while they lasted, in the interludes between them Van Gogh's thinking was lucid, and he was able to work well. Indeed, work was the best therapy, so he believed and was advised. By an effort of will he did his utmost not to become fixated on the idea that he was sick.

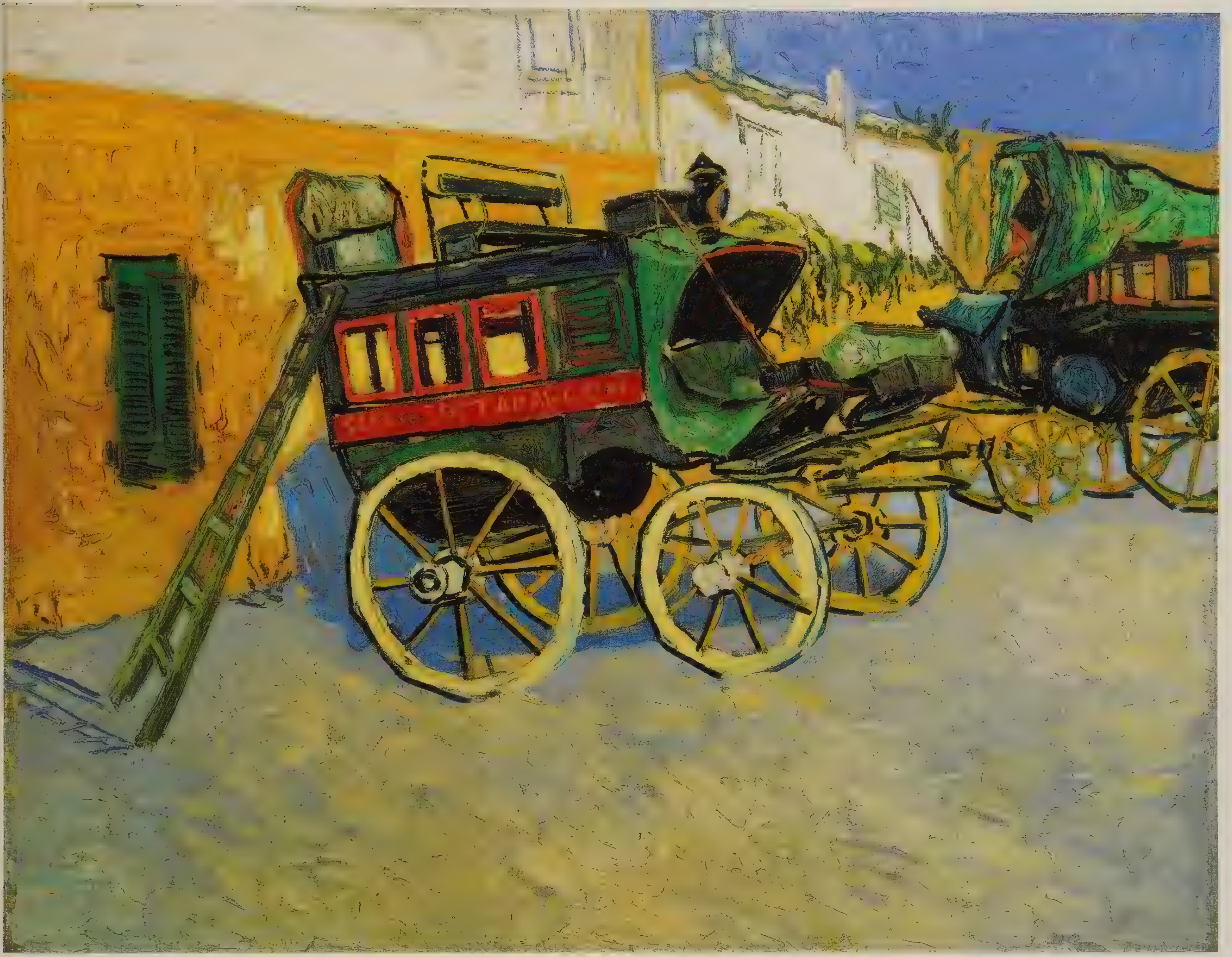
Health is the theme of one of his first still lifes of 1889 (ill. 128). On his wooden drawing board he arranged the familiar and reassuring objects that made up his daily existence, a candle, matches, pipe, wine bottle, onions, an opened letter, doubtless from Theo, and a popular health manual, François-Vincent Raspail's *Annuaire de la santé*, in which he must have sought a remedy for insomnia. The main subject that preoccupied him in early 1889 was ideally suited to restoring his equilibrium: a portrait of a woman rocking a cradle. Based on Augustine Roulin, the wife of the postman whose whole family Van Gogh had painted over recent months, it was intended to be a deeply consoling image, emblematic of motherhood. Writing to Theo on 28 January, he traced its origin to conversations he had had with Gauguin about life on board ship in the wake of reading Pierre Loti's *Icelandic Fisherman* (1886). He hoped that 'sailors, who are at once children and martyrs, seeing it in the cabin of their Icelandic fishing boat, would feel the old sense of being rocked come over them and remember their own lullabies.' [747/574] He admitted that the garish colour scheme would offend some: 'Now it may be said that it is like a chromolithograph from a cheap shop. A woman in green with orange hair standing out against a background of green with pink flowers.' So, in order to counter the 'sharpness' of the raw pinks, greens and oranges, he had introduced, pursuing his musical analogy, certain 'flats' in the form of reds and greens.

The different areas of the composition are variously handled. In this version (ill. 129), probably the final one, the riotous wallpaper reaches a peak of intensity, which has to be an exaggeration of the Roulins' exuberant petit bourgeois taste! While the small flecked brushmarks used for the sitter's complexion are consistent with recent self-portraits, the unmodulated execution of the green bodice and red lower wall, bound within solid contour lines, pays homage to Gauguin, as does the inclusion of the latter's armchair. No other motif was repeated so many times as *La berceuse*, which Van Gogh clearly considered to be one of his most successful portrait types. He painted



128
Still life with a plate of onions
1889
oil on canvas
50 x 64 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo


La Berceuse

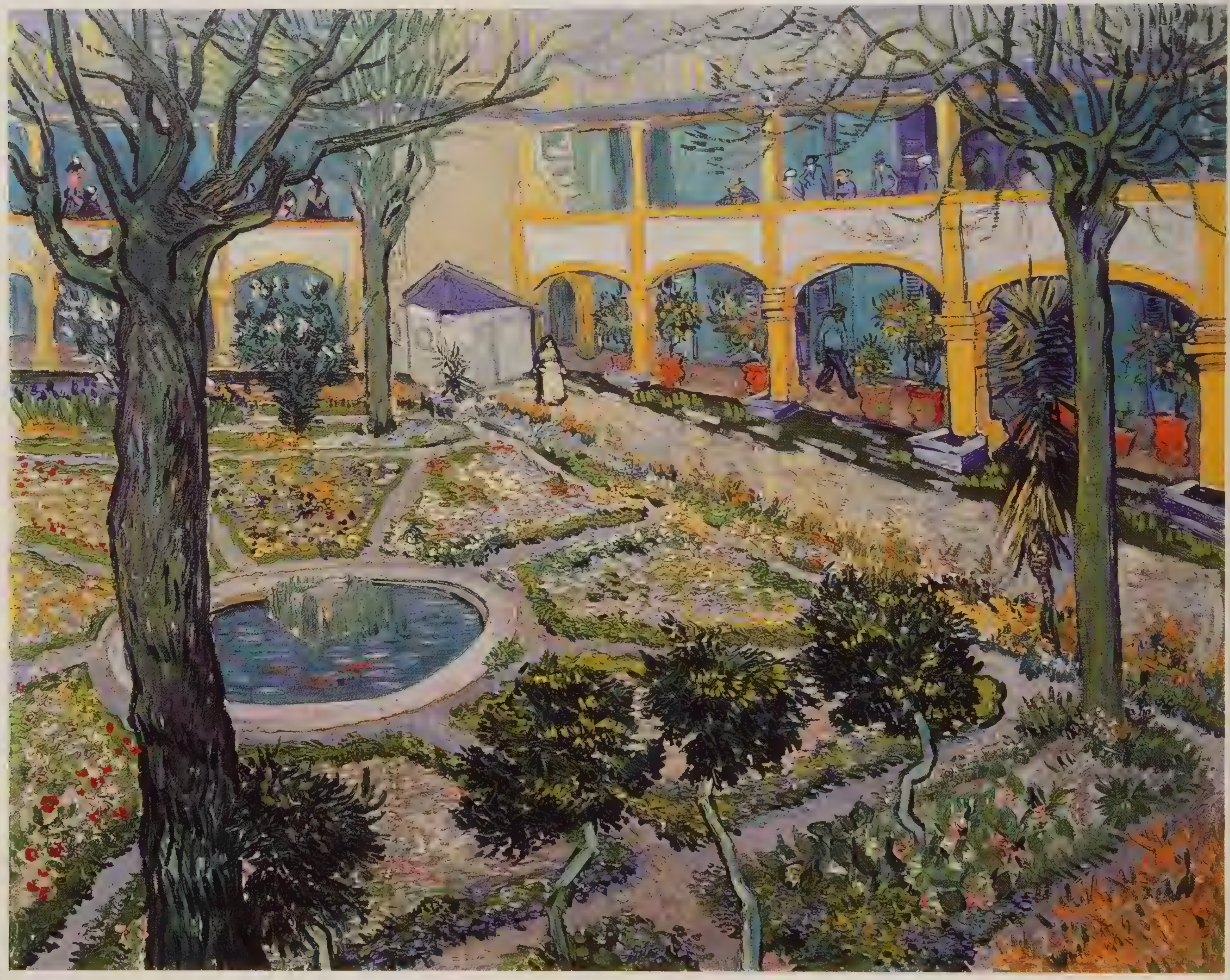


five different versions, all on the same large-scale (size 30) canvases: one for the sitter, one for each of his artist friends Gauguin and Bernard, one for Theo and one for himself. He mused about hanging the portrait flanked on either side by paintings of sunflowers so as to form a glowing triptych, or alternating with such paintings to form a decorative sequence.

For some time Van Gogh had been drawing a clear distinction between works that were mere exercises or studies and works like *La berceuse* that he wished to be judged by, that were to make up his oeuvre. Later in the year, he talked about reworking and refining certain 1888 canvases which he had already sent to Theo – specifically *The Tarascon diligence* (ill. 130), the *Green vineyard* (ill. 94), *The harvest* (ill. 91) and the *Red cabaret*, which was Van Gogh's way of referring to *The night café* (ill. 98). Time would not allow him that privilege.

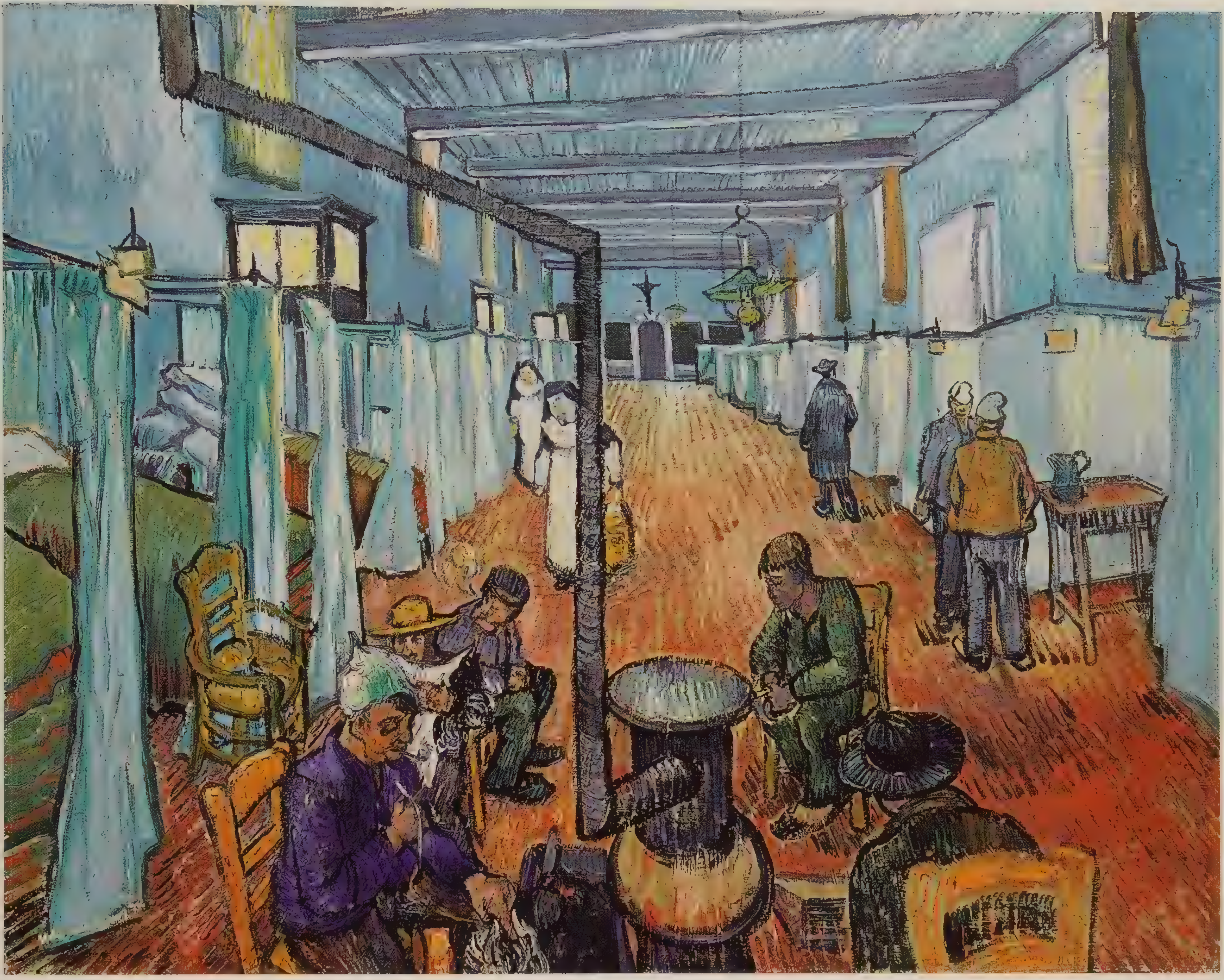
129
La berceuse
(Portrait of Madame Roulin)
1889
oil on canvas
92 x 73 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum,
Otterlo

130
The Tarascon diligence
1888
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
The Art Museum, Princeton



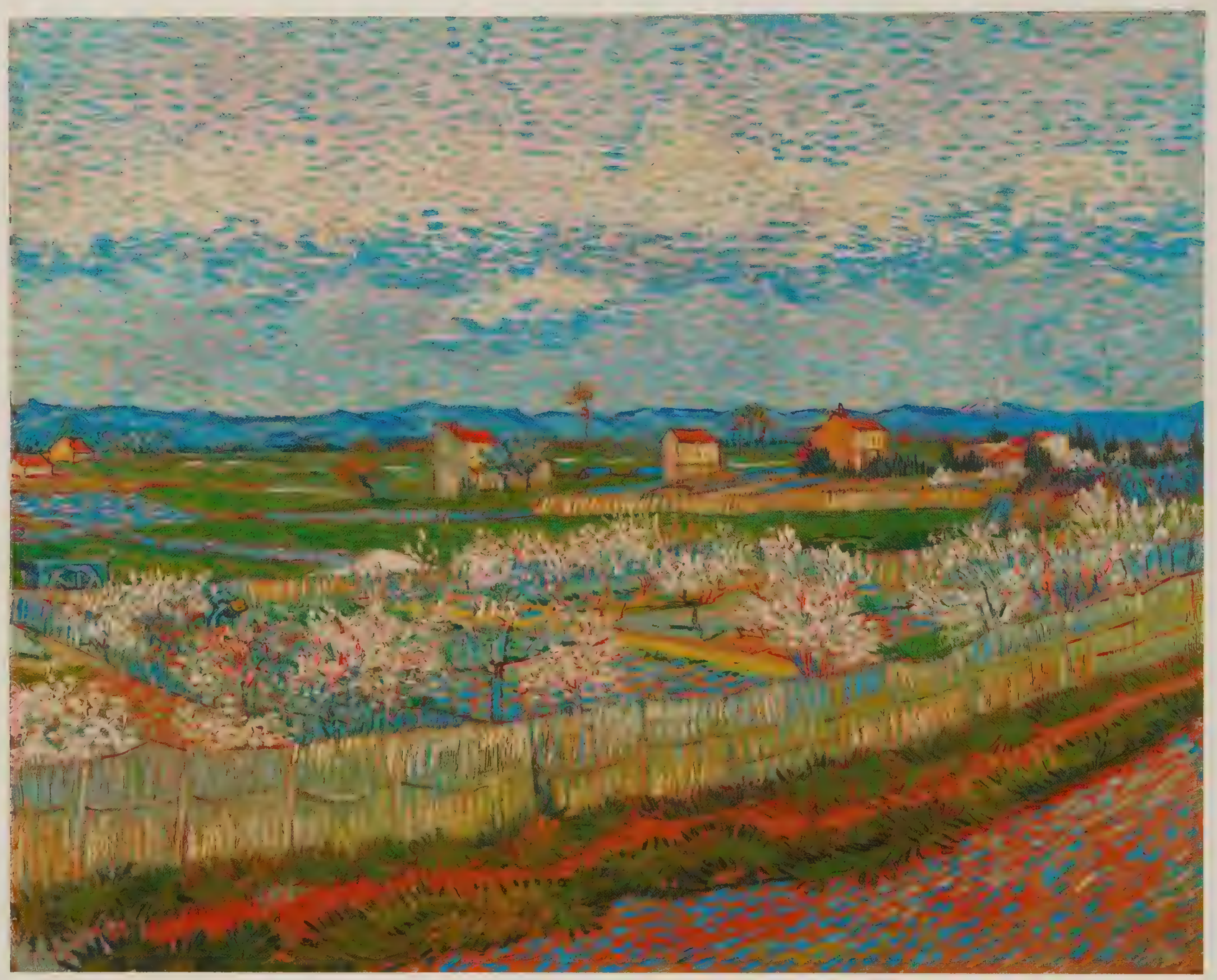
131
The courtyard of the hospital
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Oscar Reinhart Collection, Winterthur

Another short-lived attack laid Van Gogh low in late March 1889, and he returned to the hospital in Arles. There he painted a rather complex view of the hospital courtyard and its garden with radiating flower-beds, and he began a view of the ward, which he completed later in the year (ill. 131, 132). While he was in hospital, he was visited by Paul Signac, en route for Cassis on the Mediterranean coast. By mid-April Van Gogh seems to have been able to come and go as he pleased again, returning to the countryside to capture the orchards in bloom, a theme that had preoccupied him the previous year. He executed two beautiful paintings on the subject. In one (ill. 133), painted in a decorative, boldly dabbed touch, he adopted almost the same viewpoint as the previous year, the road overlooking the plain of La Crau. Using the cane hedge to limit the foreground, he painted an oblique view towards the Alpilles incorporating the same poor cottages that had featured in his 1888

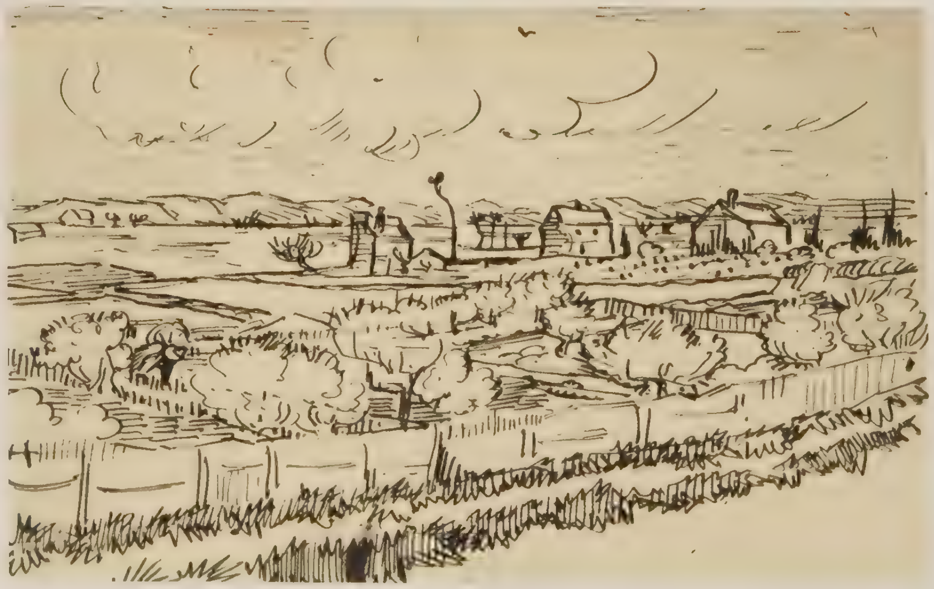


132
The hospital in Arles
1889
oil on canvas
74 x 92 cm
Oscar Reinhart Collection,
Winterthur

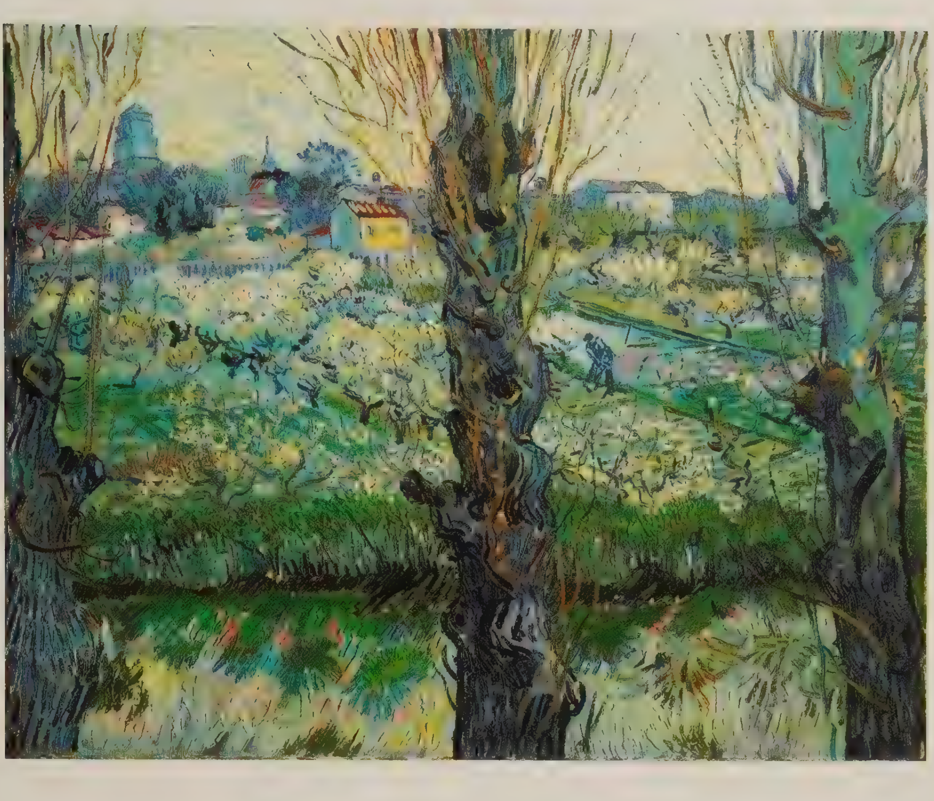
harvest scene. Describing his choice of motif to Signac, and sketching it (ill. 134), he wrote: 'everything is small there, the gardens, the fields, the orchards, and the trees, even the mountains, as in certain Japanese landscapes, which is the reason why the subject attracted me.' [760/583b] In a second orchard view looking towards Arles (ill. 135), he established a dramatic screen of vertical poplars in the foreground, their trunks cut off at top and bottom by the canvas edge; it can be seen as a more naturalistic version of the decorative Japoniste device he had used for Les Alyscamps (ill. 117). The palette is of soft blues, greens and pinks, and the whole surface is highly controlled, yet remarkably lively and rhythmic. He was clearly pleased with this painting, and it became one of those that drew him to public attention: in the autumn, Père Tanguy put it in his shop window, and Van Gogh designated it as one of his submissions to the exhibition of the Belgian group *Les Vingt* in 1890.



133
Peach blossom in the Crau
1889
oil on canvas
65 x 81 cm
The Samuel Courtauld Trust,
Courtauld Institute of Art Gallery,
London



134
Sketch in a letter to Paul Signac
of c. 10 April 1889 [760/583b]
Private collection



135
A view of Arles
1889
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich

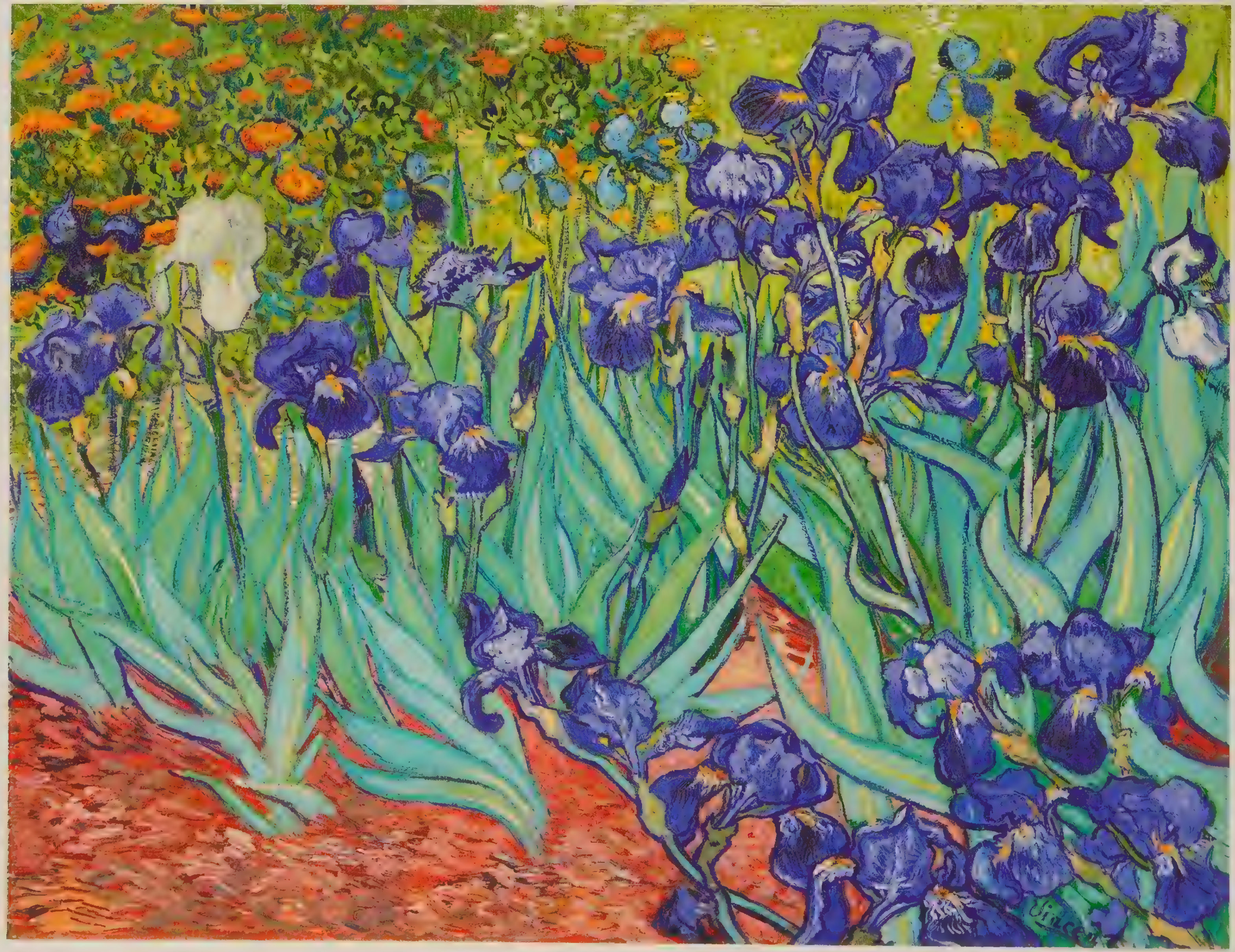
A CLOISTERED LIFE In May 1889, anxiety about his mental state and fear of the recurrence of breakdowns led Van Gogh to take steps to protect himself. Theo wrote to explain the situation to their mother: 'Out of his own free will and with the cooperation of the Reverend Salles it has now been decided that for some time he will be looked after in Saint-Rémy, not far from Arles where there is an institution that has 45 patients.' [letter from Theo, early May 1889] The former monastery of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole had been run since the seventeenth century as an institution for the mentally ill. With its austere stone steps and long corridors, off which lay series of simple, cell-like rooms, it had a monastic character that perhaps suited Van Gogh. But it was staffed by Catholic nuns, like most French hospitals at this date, whose ways and superstitious beliefs he eventually found irksome. He chose not to paint them. At the centre of the building complex was a chapel, but if Van Gogh ever attended the daily service, again there is no evidence of it in his work. The régime for inmates – which involved baths, exercise in the gardens and regular meals, although he spurned the insipid diet – was regulated by bells. The clinic was surrounded by pine trees and enclosed cloistered gardens. Van Gogh would eventually occupy two rooms, one to sleep in and another as a studio. His immediate outlook faced east and encompassed a walled field; with a bit of effort, looking out through his window, he could see the ridge of the Alpilles. Their undulating craggy range provides a backdrop to several of his landscape compositions (ill. 139).

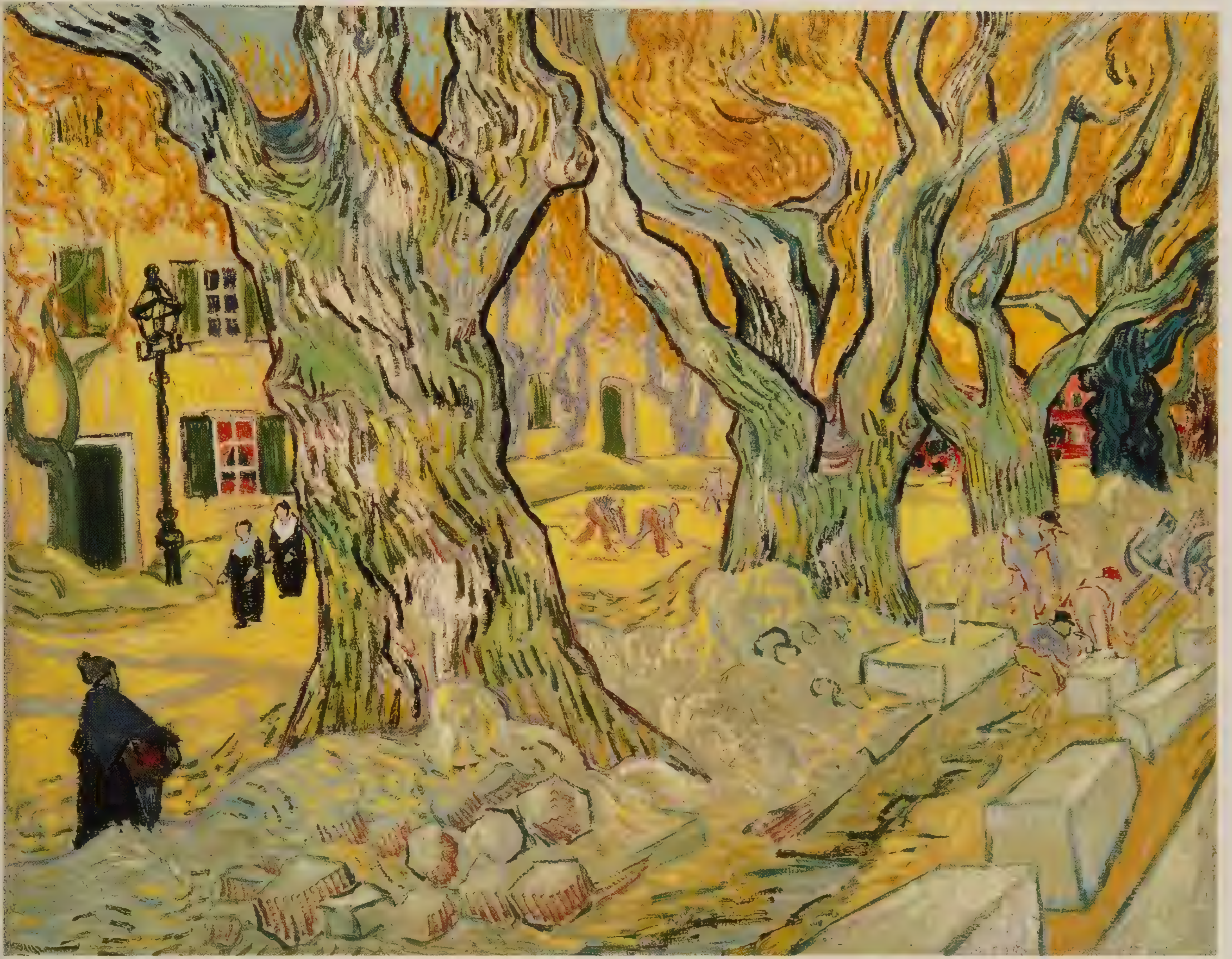
Such a regulated, concentrated way of living was in a sense ideally conducive to work. Paradoxically, out of this ordered seclusion, surrounded by

136
Irises
1889
oil on canvas
71 x 93 cm
The J. Paul Getty Museum,
Los Angeles

inactive fellow patients suffering from all manner of psychiatric conditions, Van Gogh produced a stream of impassioned, urgent and unrestrained canvases, in which nature is infused with a vital pulse and rhythmic life force. One of the first to be painted in this dynamic manner – an effective marriage of his graphic mark-making and his application of colour – was of *Irises* (ill. 136), which must have been in bloom at the time of his arrival. The painter adopts a low-level viewpoint to maximise the vertical thrust of the flowers and their sword-like leaves. As in the case of the sunflowers and oleanders, he seems to have responded as much to the noble structure of the flowers as to their colour and texture; he would revisit the theme in a powerful still life the following spring (ill. 156).

He was soon given permission to explore beyond the immediate environs of the clinic. Although predominantly flat, the terrain around Saint-

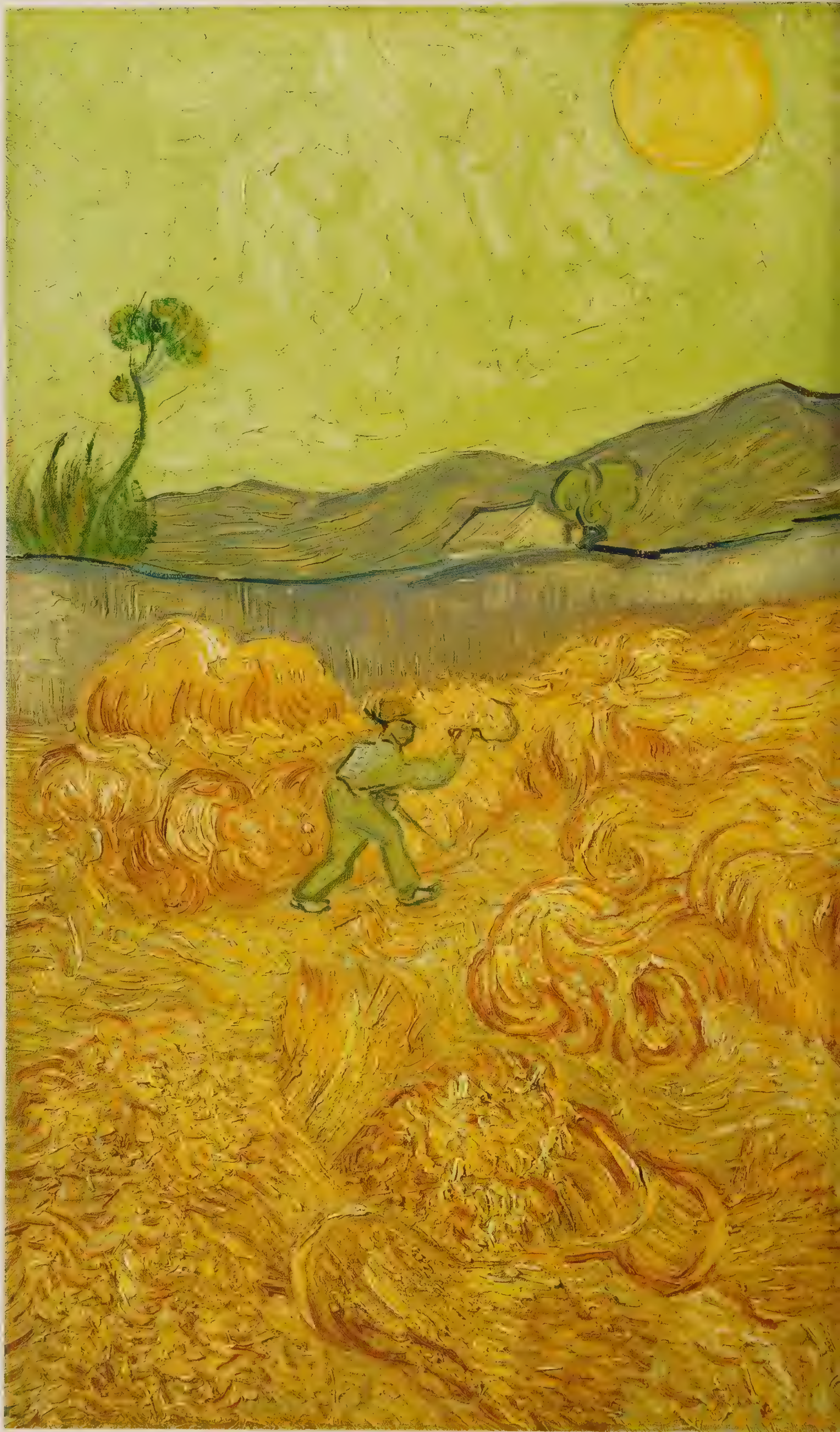


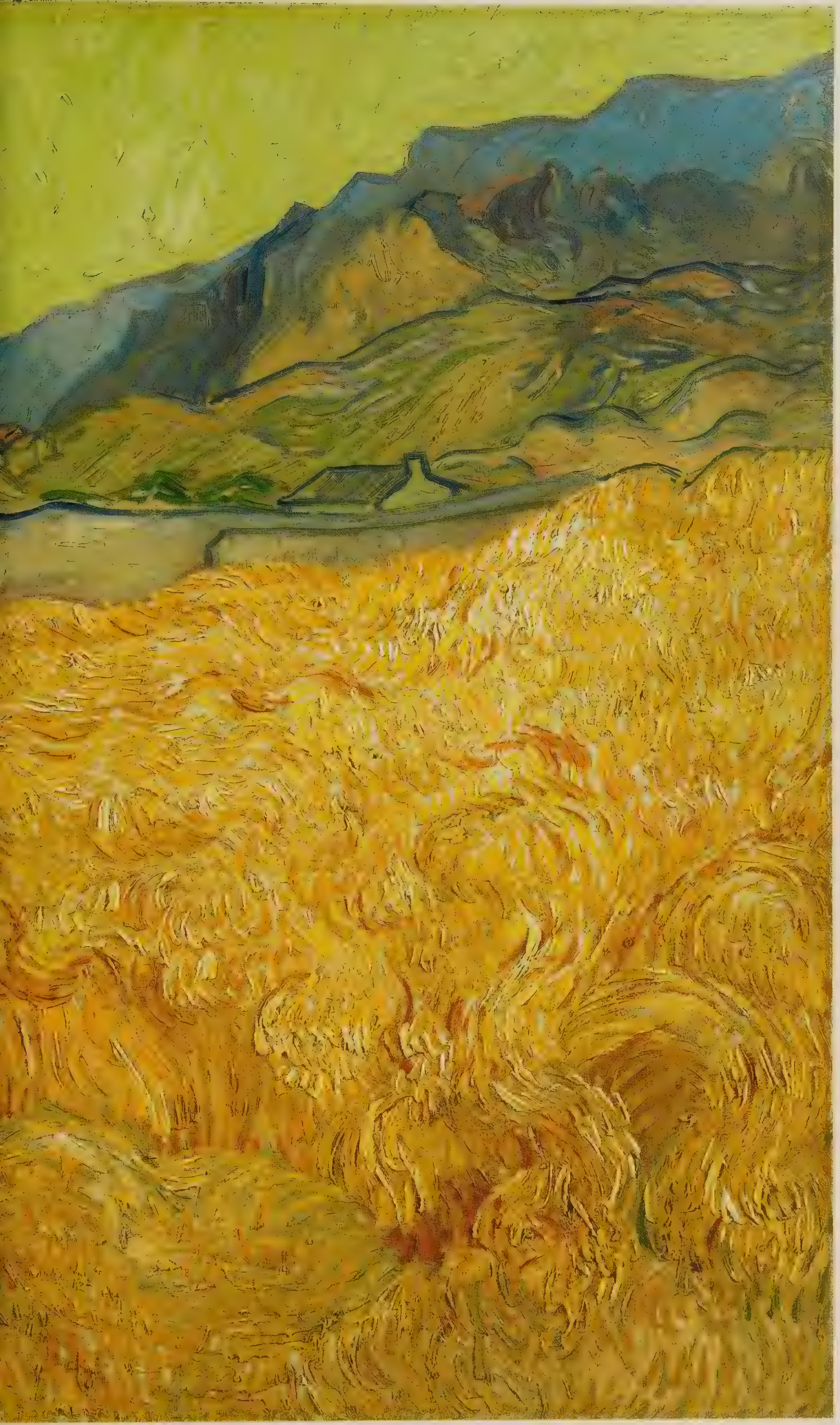


137
The road menders
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
The Phillips Collection,
Washington

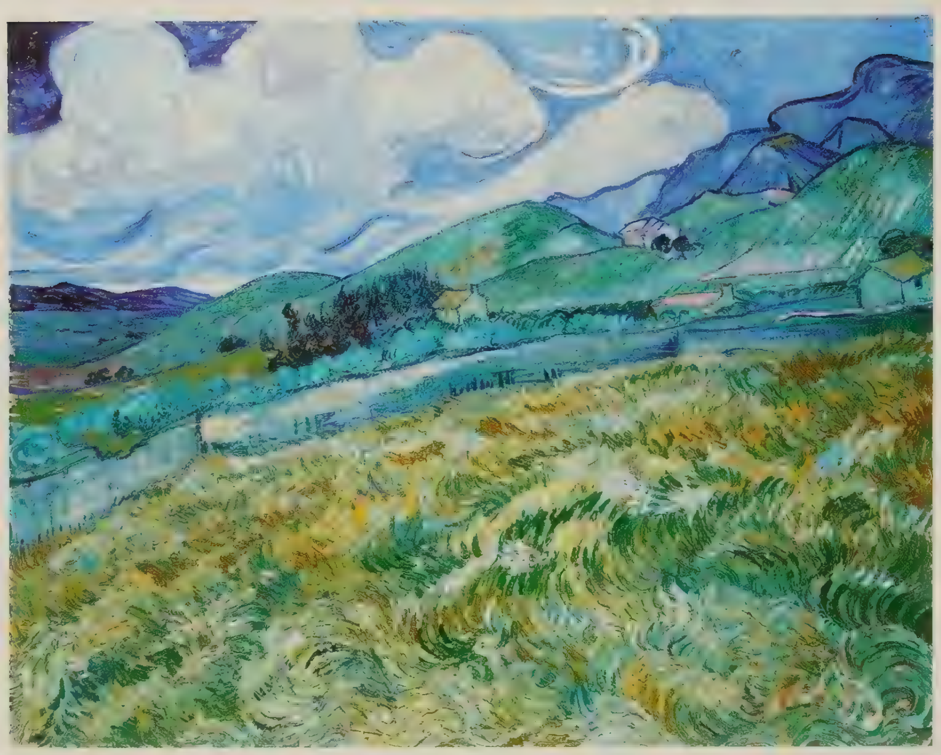
Rémy was less tractable and intensively cultivated than that around Arles. A few hundred metres away lay the Roman site of Glanum, its imposing triumphal arch, tower and other remains recalling an important provincial settlement. But once again Van Gogh chose to ignore this picturesque opportunity. Instead, he made a conscious decision to work away at the olive groves in the immediate vicinity of the clinic and later on made forays into the Alpilles (ill. 147).

Van Gogh's output of paintings during the year he spent at Saint-Rémy was remarkably high. His overall range of subjects stayed much the same, a mix of landscapes, still lifes and flower paintings, though within this there were campaigns devoted to single themes, and within these again a tendency to paint repeat versions of works that satisfied him. The scenes of modern working life and portraits that had interested him in Paris were virtually





138
Wheatfield with a reaper
1889
oil on canvas
74 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

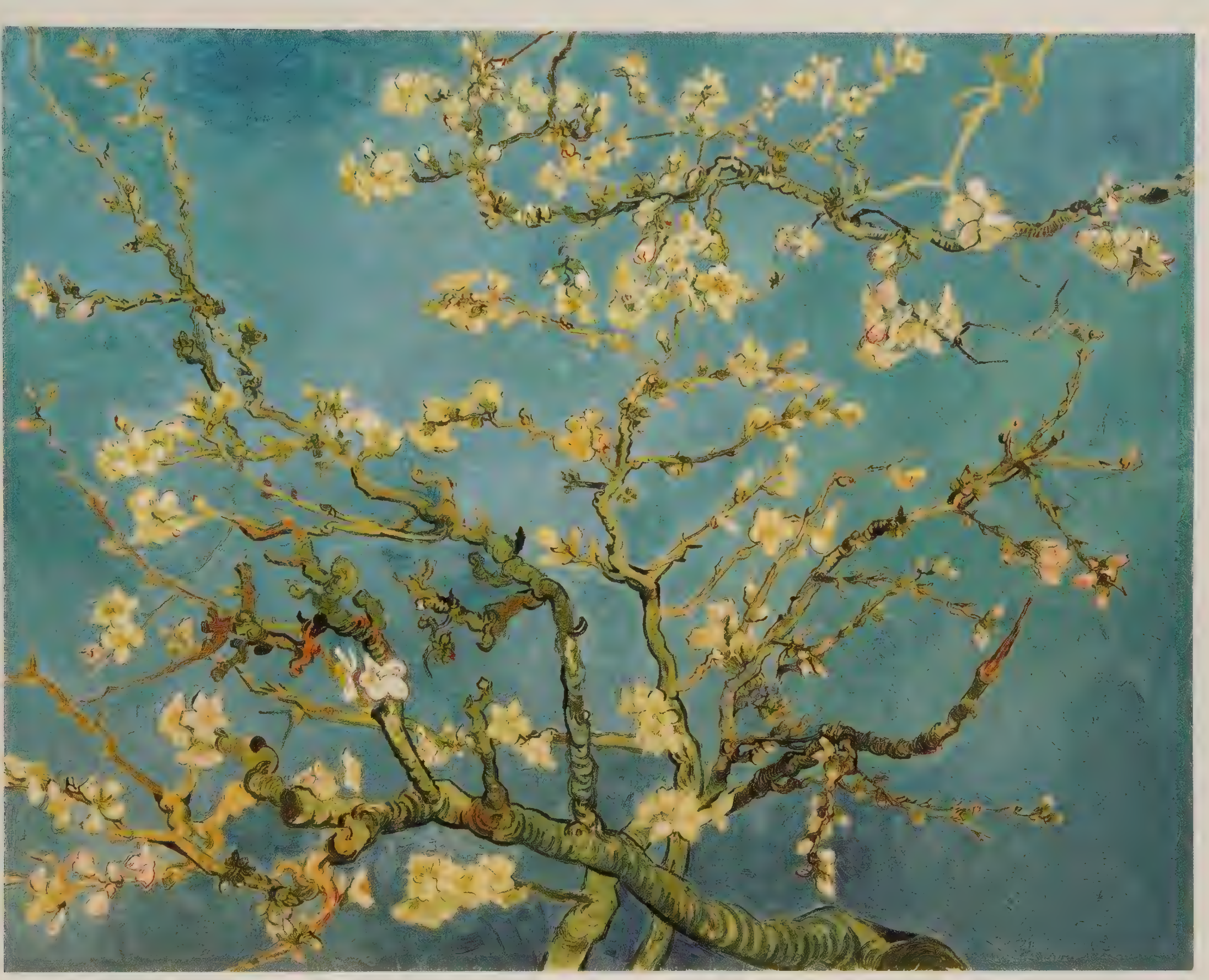


139
Mountainous landscape behind Saint-Paul-de-Mausole
1889
oil on canvas
70 x 88 cm
Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

abandoned. His study of road menders in the main street of Saint-Rémy is exceptional (ill. 137). The town is just a kilometre to the north of the clinic, and on occasion Van Gogh clearly ventured there to post batches of paintings to Theo and briefly reimmerse himself in normal life.

In terms of the paintings' physical appearance and texture, however, there were important changes, and the Saint-Rémy period is characterised by a concerted effort on Van Gogh's part towards style. Instead of the broad flat expanses of colour bounded by strong cloisonist contours, or the choppy, short, woven textures seen in certain Arles paintings, he now tended to subject his compositions to a unifying flame-like motion. His brushwork began to acquire a sinuous vitality that infuses the whole of his canvas surface.

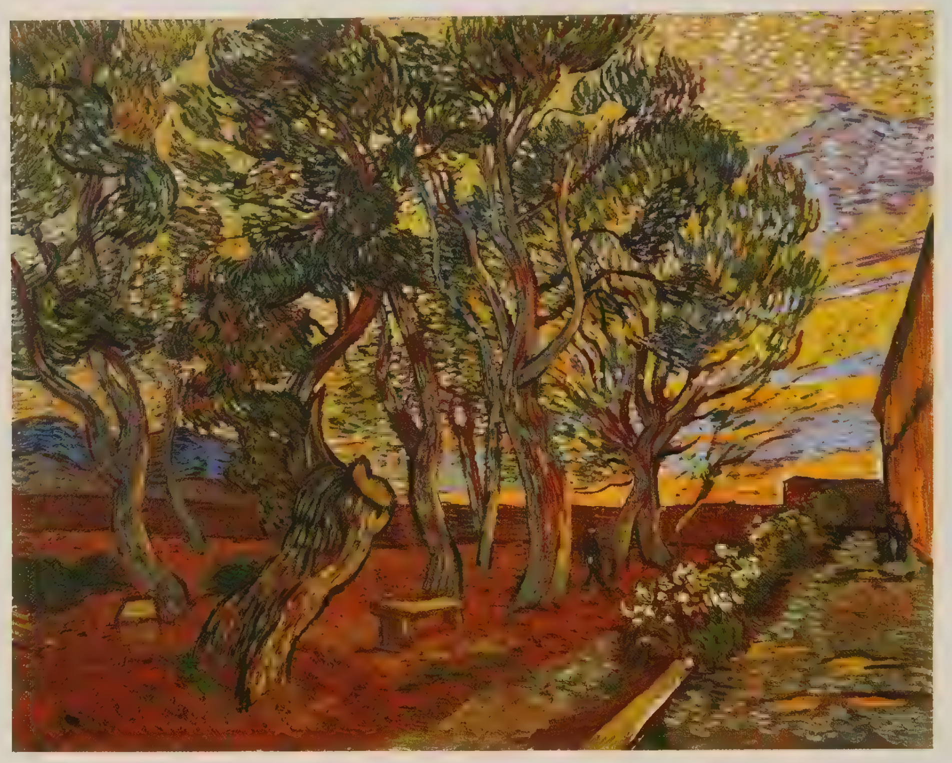
Van Gogh's more conscious searching after a robust, virile style was a development that, by the autumn, began to disturb Theo. But Vincent defended himself by comparing what he was attempting with Delacroix's treatment of landscape: 'I am well aware that the studies in the last package, drawn with those great sinuous lines, were not what they need to be but I urge you to believe that in landscape there will be a continuing effort to mass things by means of a drawing style which tries to express the tangling of the masses.' [818/613]. Although his brushwork became more emphatic and stylised, in Saint-Rémy Van Gogh's colour harmonies became less garish, moving away from the strident primaries and chrome tints he had used in Arles into half-tones and ochres: blue-grey, olive-green, russet. The *Self-portrait* painted in September is a successful crystallisation of the new tendencies



140
Almond blossom
1890
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

(ill. 146): in offsetting the orange of his beard and hair against a subtle swirling pattern of ice blue, green and purple – a harmony possibly inspired by the silvery grey foliage of the olive trees – which carries over into the 'ashen' shadows of his face and the colour of the eyes, Van Gogh gives his sad-looking features and furrowed brow a somewhat ethereal isolation.

Whereas his stay in Arles had been broken up by encounters with other artists, in Saint-Rémy Van Gogh was left entirely to his own devices. One suspects that this concentrated effort on painting was pursued in silence, one canvas leading to another. Human life was all but excluded. With the exception of a couple of self-portraits and a notable portrait of the attendant Trabuc (ill. 157), whose features reminded Van Gogh of a Spanish grandee – 'he has something military with his small quick black eyes' [802/605] – his interest in portraiture seems, in the main, to have been deferred. He said he



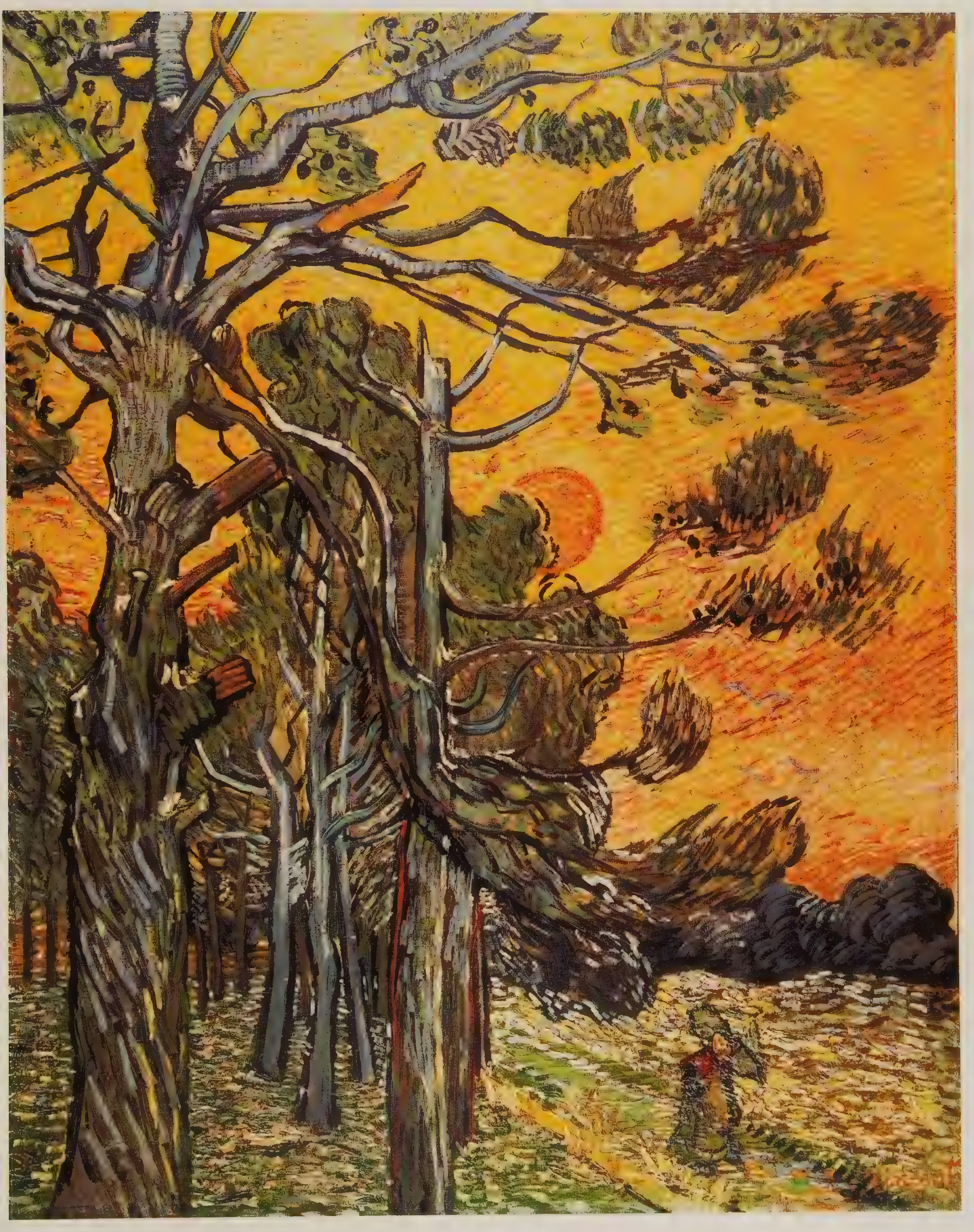
141
The garden of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole
1889
oil on canvas
71 x 90 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

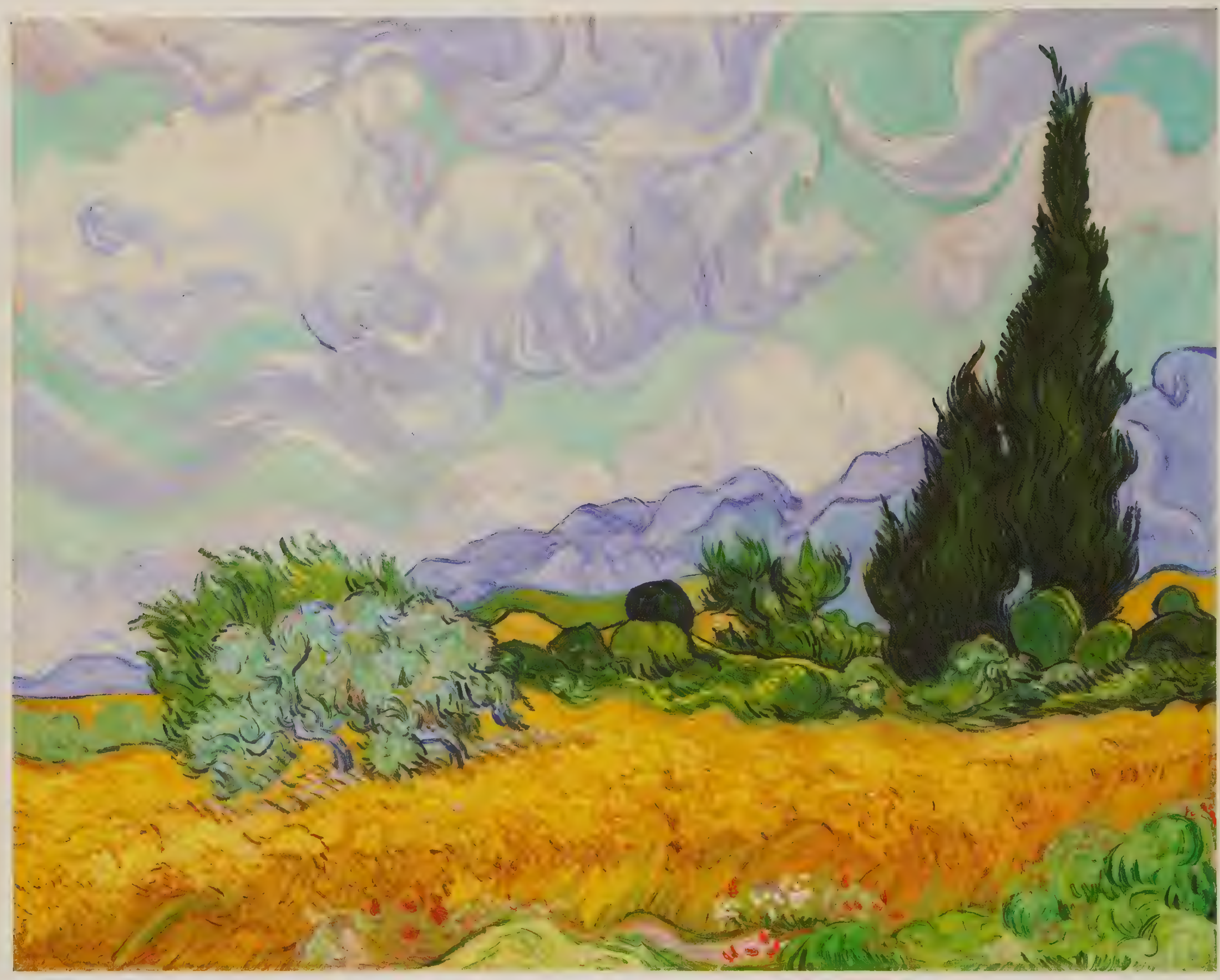
142
Pine trees at sunset
1889
oil on canvas
91 x 72 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

had no models. He rarely mentioned his fellow inmates, the occupants of neighbouring rooms. Selfishly, he sensed that his own wellbeing depended upon avoiding any possible 'contagion' from others less fortunate.

In July 1889 a seizure and ensuing depression kept him confined indoors for the remaining summer months; he used the restricted circumstances to pursue a certain *idée fixe*: a painting of the field he could see from his window with a reaper, whose task – to scythe down the ripe corn – took on a symbolic significance equivalent to his earlier sower. Having started the composition in July, he eventually completed it and painted a replica version in September (ill. 138). Finally he was able to tell Theo: 'the reaper is finished. I think it will be one of those you'll keep at home – it's an image of death as the great book of nature speaks of it – but the effect I've been looking for is – "on the point of smiling". It's all yellow, except for a line of purple hills, pale and golden yellow. I find it odd that I saw it like that through the iron bars of a cell.' [801/604] As he was often to do, Van Gogh included the sun's orb low in the sky, as he must have seen it in the early morning.

OLIVES, PINES AND CYPRESSES Unconsciously at first, then with increasing premeditation, Van Gogh concentrated his attention on trees, seeing in them a suitable key with which to unlock the essential character of Provence. The olive orchards with their undulating rows of twisting trees presented a new and different painterly challenge from the fruit orchards around Arles. That June, Van Gogh made a number of paintings of them,

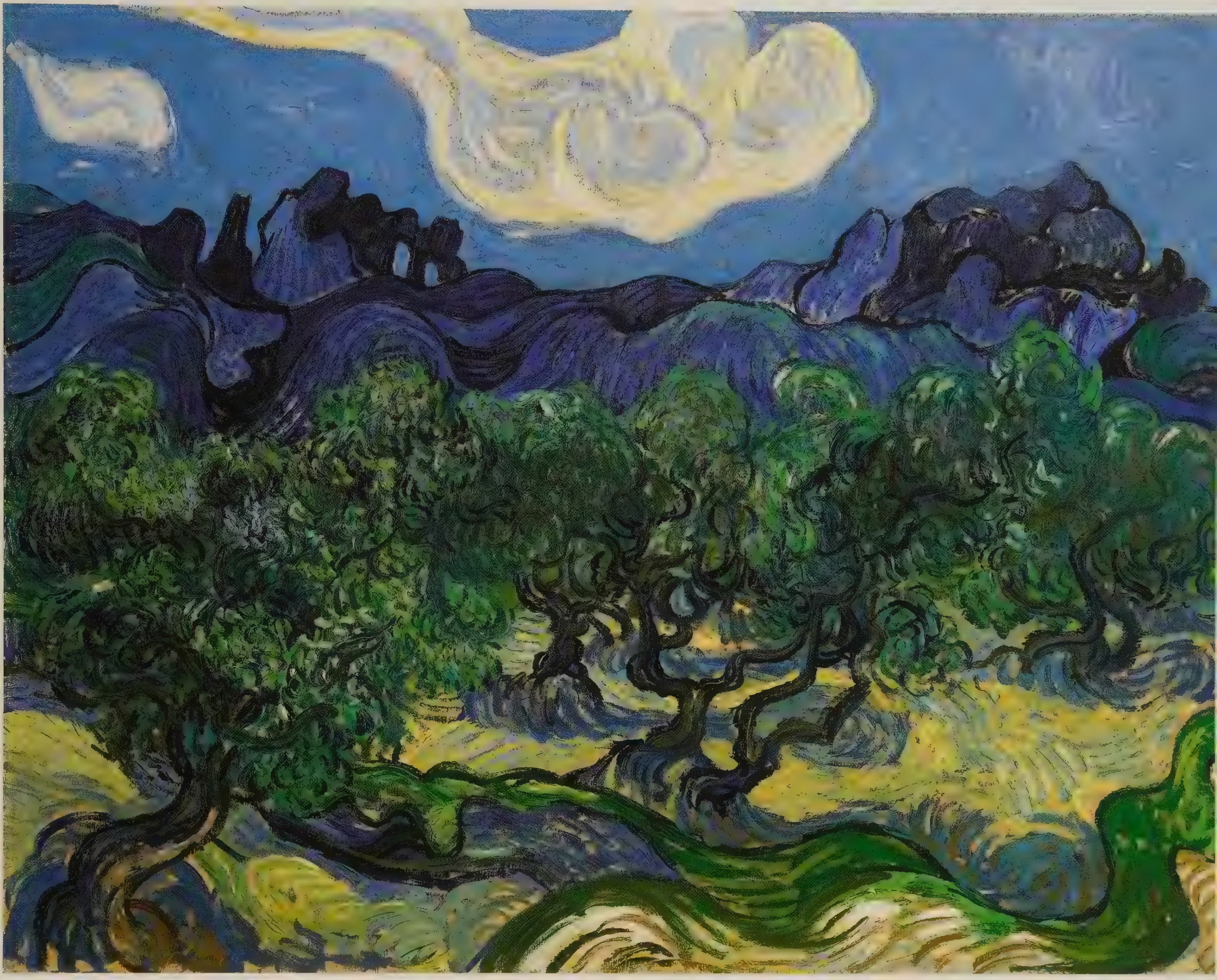




143
Wheatfield with cypresses
1889
oil on canvas
72 x 91 cm
National Gallery,
London

trying to find an equivalence in his brushwork to the extraordinary growth patterns they formed (ill. 144).

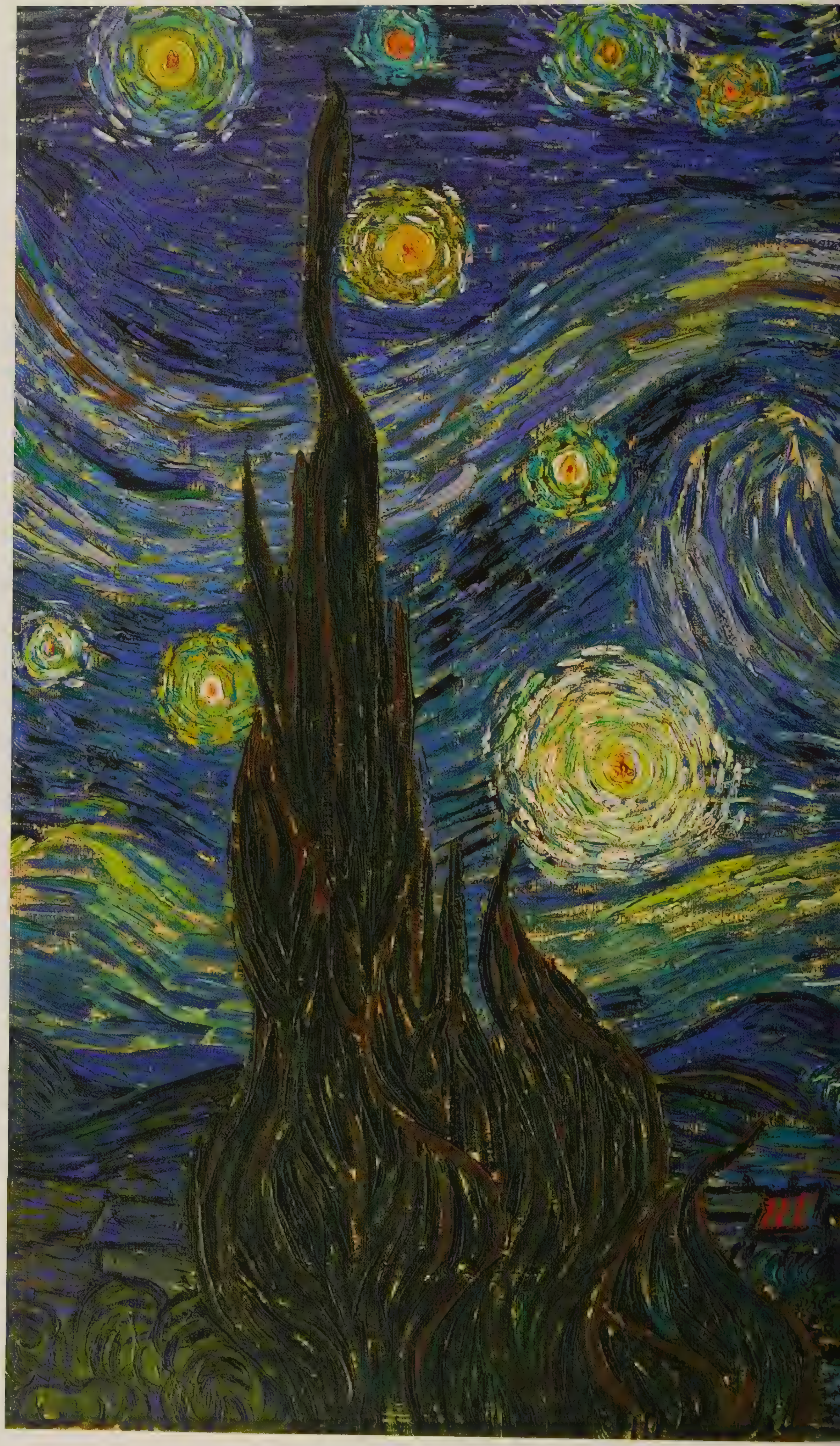
Pines grew in the neglected garden and immediate vicinity of Saint-Paul. They were too tall to take in at a single glance, so, at first, Van Gogh concentrated his attention on the base of their trunks, obliterating horizon and visible sky. In the remarkable view of *Undergrowth* (ill. 158), the ivy-clad lower trunks of the pine trees are evoked using a taut but restless pattern of brush marks in cool bluish hues. (His sister-in-law Jo took delight in contemplating this cool glade when she came upon the painting at the Salon des Indépendants the following year.) Another view of pines painted later in the year incorporates a glimpse of the clinic and diminutive figures of patients or staff (ill. 141). Van Gogh likened the blasted tree in the foreground to an 'austere giant – his pride wounded' [824/B21]. In *Pine trees at*

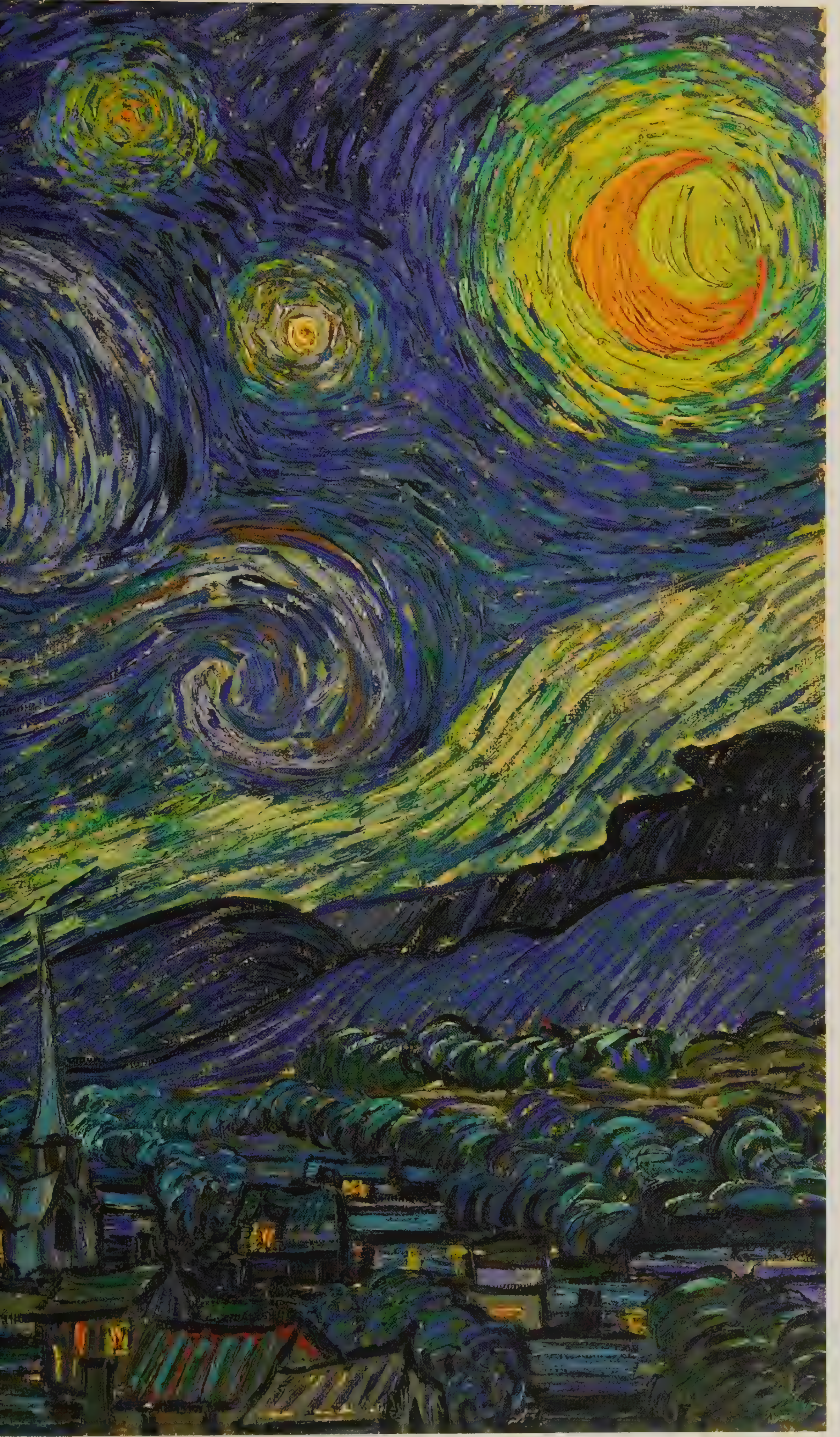


sunset, he looked upwards, encompassing just the tops of the trees silhouetted 'with exquisite black lace effects' against the pale lemon evening sky (ill. 142) [830/617]. In this dramatic composition, a swirling pattern of brushstrokes unites earth and sky; the two foreground trees have had their trunks and branches severed by the mistral, against whose force the burdened woman on the path below struggles.

144
The olive trees
1889
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York,
Mrs. John Hay Whitney Bequest

Then there were the cypress trees, standing tall and dark, their triangular shapes making welcome punctuation marks in the luminous landscape, reminding Van Gogh of Egyptian obelisks. Traditionally, cypresses tended to be planted in cemeteries, and for many they carried associations with death. But one of Van Gogh's most memorable landscape compositions painted that June seems to eschew such associations (ill. 143). He placed a horizontal wedge of ripe golden corn in the foreground, a clump of olive





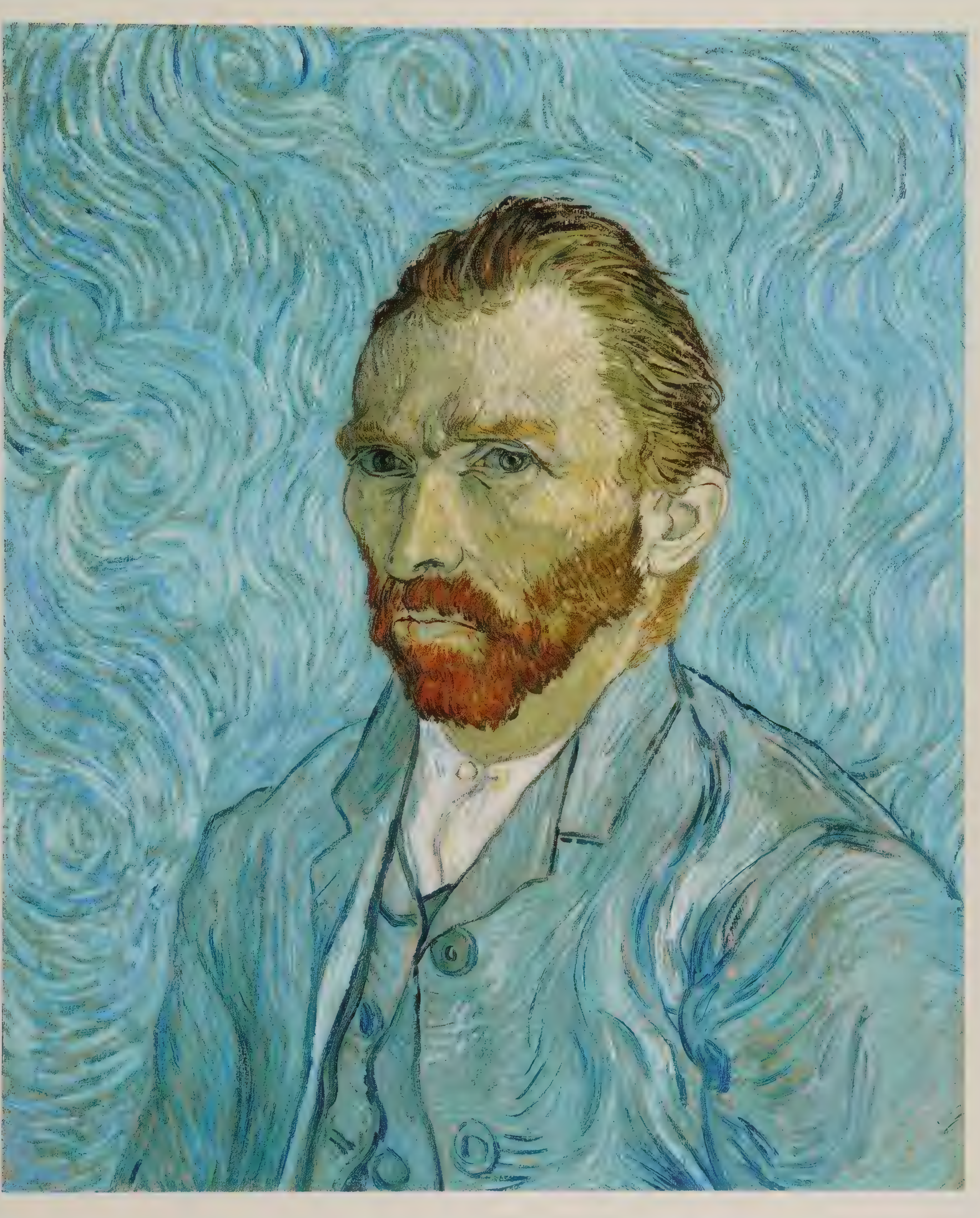
145
The starry night
1889
oil on canvas
74 x 92 cm
The Museum of Modern Art,
New York,
Lillie P. Bliss Bequest

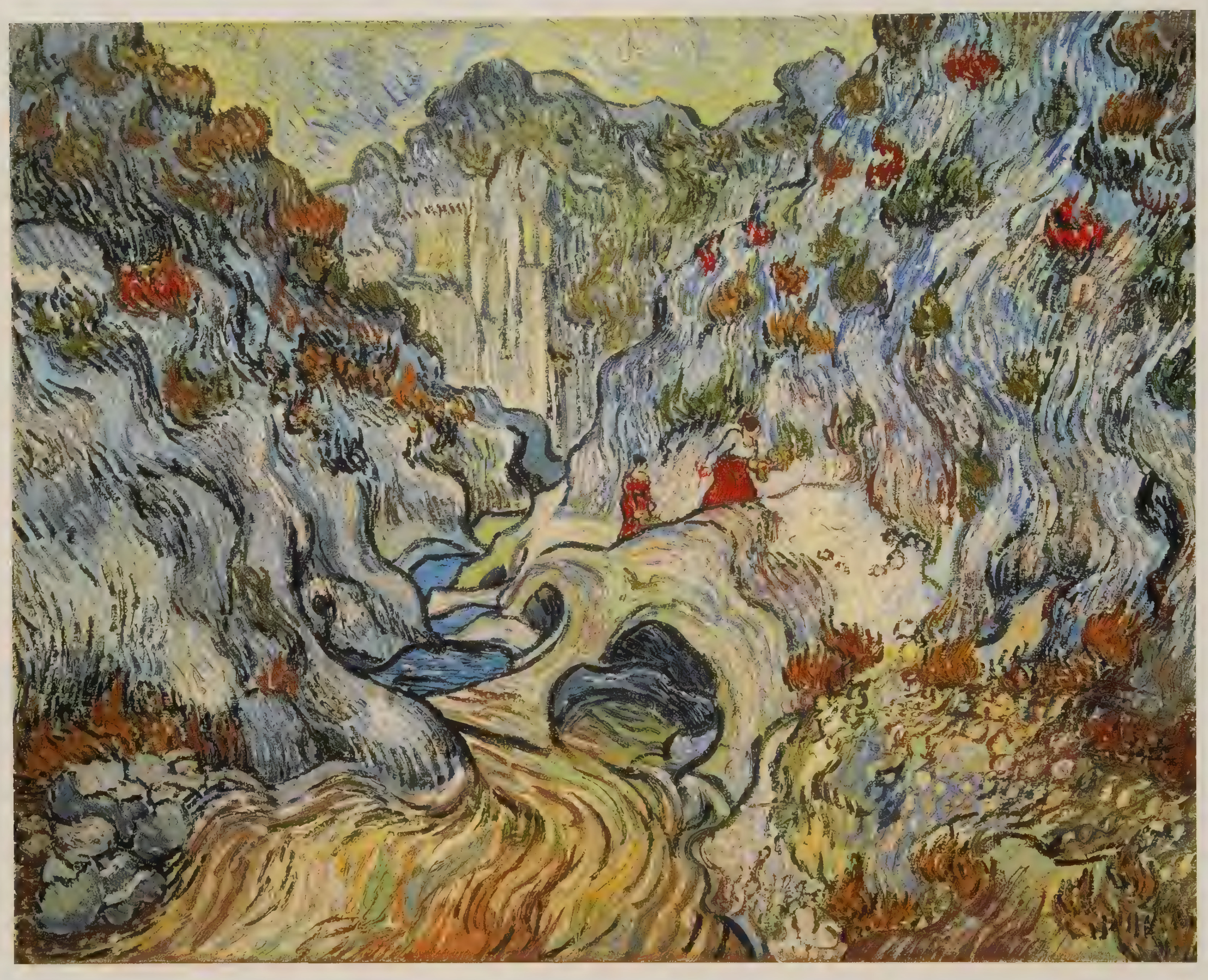
trees and a couple of dark cypresses in the middle ground. The largest section of the canvas is given over to the sky, painted in a wholly exaggerated way with billowing blue and white clouds seen against the greenish ether, their extraordinary animation seeming to mimic the surging blue line of the rocky Alpilles. Pleased with his achievement, Van Gogh promptly painted an equally forceful replica.

The rhythmic organicism that comes to the fore in this canvas is seen in two other key works painted as day and night pendants at around the same time. In *The olive trees* (ill. 144), arabesques run riot through the whole composition, and the brightly lit landscape is dominated by a weirdly figurative, almost maternal-looking white cloud; in *The starry night* (ill. 145), undoubtedly one of the artist's most celebrated works, the heavenward thrust of the cypress intersects a star-studded sky that is alive with cosmic movement. Van Gogh acknowledged that both compositions were 'exaggerations from the point of view of arrangement, their lines are warped as in old wood.' [806/607] Since first arriving in Provence, Van Gogh had looked at the night sky a good deal. He was fascinated by the map-like relationship between the constellations and cast his imagination forward to the possible journey to be made, beyond the grave, to their starry realm. This was his second attempt at interpreting this essentially poetic subject. He dispenses with figures and is unabashed about melding reality, fantasy and memory: the hills are the Alpilles as he could see them from his room, but the village nestling beneath them, with its elegant church steeple, is wholly imaginary, replete with the artist's growing nostalgia for the north.

146
Self-portrait
1889
oil on canvas
65 x 54 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

Van Gogh brought cypress trees to centre stage in two further canvases painted that June. A consideration of one of these (ill. 148), with its associated correspondence, allows a glimpse at how he tended to develop a theme through a complex accumulation of words, ideas and images. For by this stage in his career Van Gogh's letters, whether or not they truly reflect the way he thought when he had his paintbrush in hand, tend to weave increasingly involved skeins of association. In this instance, as he explained to Theo, he felt the dark masses of the trees (which occupy two thirds of the canvas area) required even more solid impasto in the foreground; this he built up, 'with thick layers of lead white. I think that the Monticellis were very often prepared in this way.' [785/596] Remembering Monticelli set him to thinking about his Scottish friend, the dealer Alexander Reid (1854-1928), who had bought up quantities of Monticelli's work; whereupon, perhaps by association, he compared the colour scheme he had arrived at – a striking combination of reds for poppies and dark yellows for corn with the dominant dark greens of the cypresses – with the decorative effect of Scottish tartans. Several months later, a long and laudatory article on Van Gogh was published by the young Symbolist art critic Albert Aurier (1865-1892). This drew



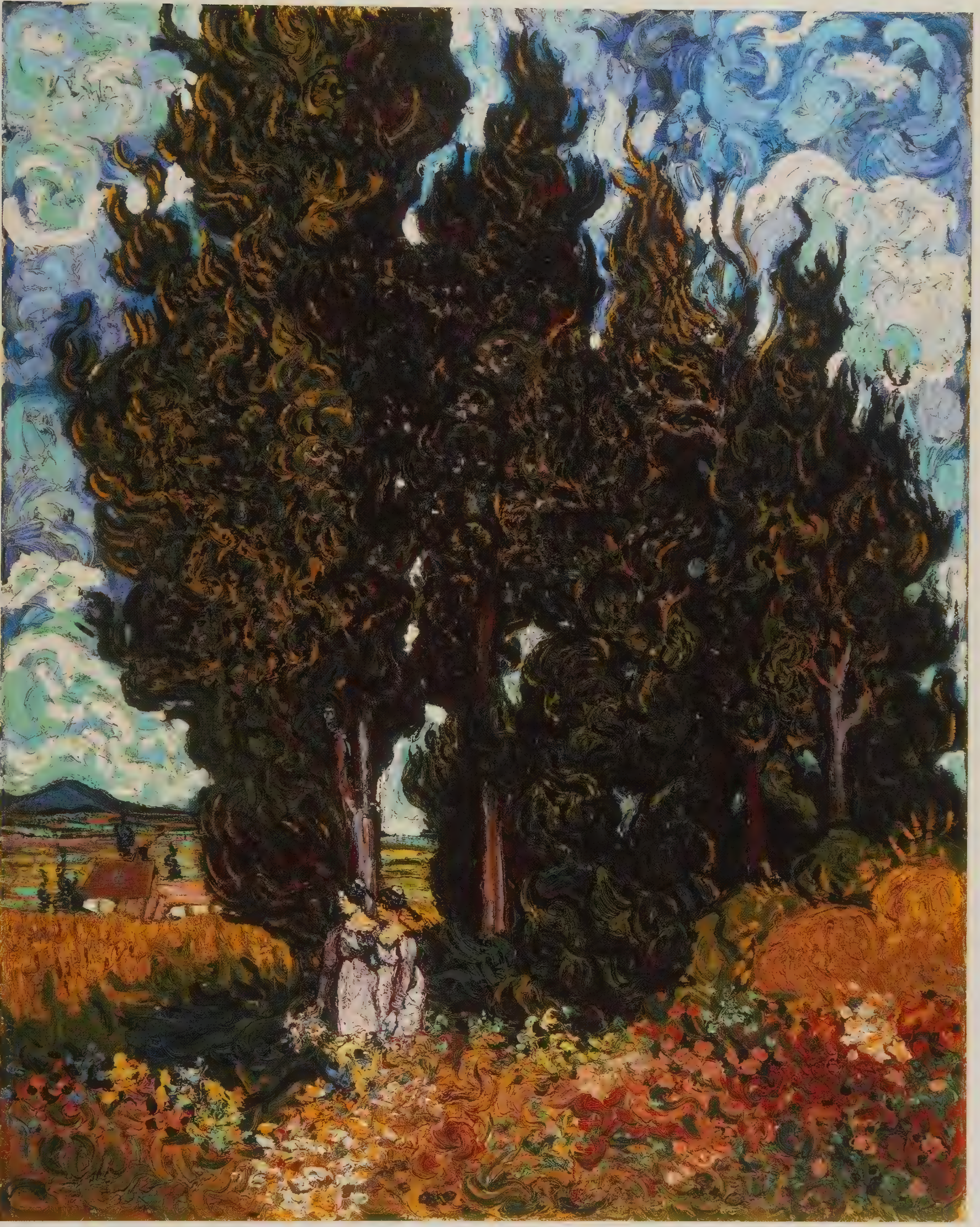


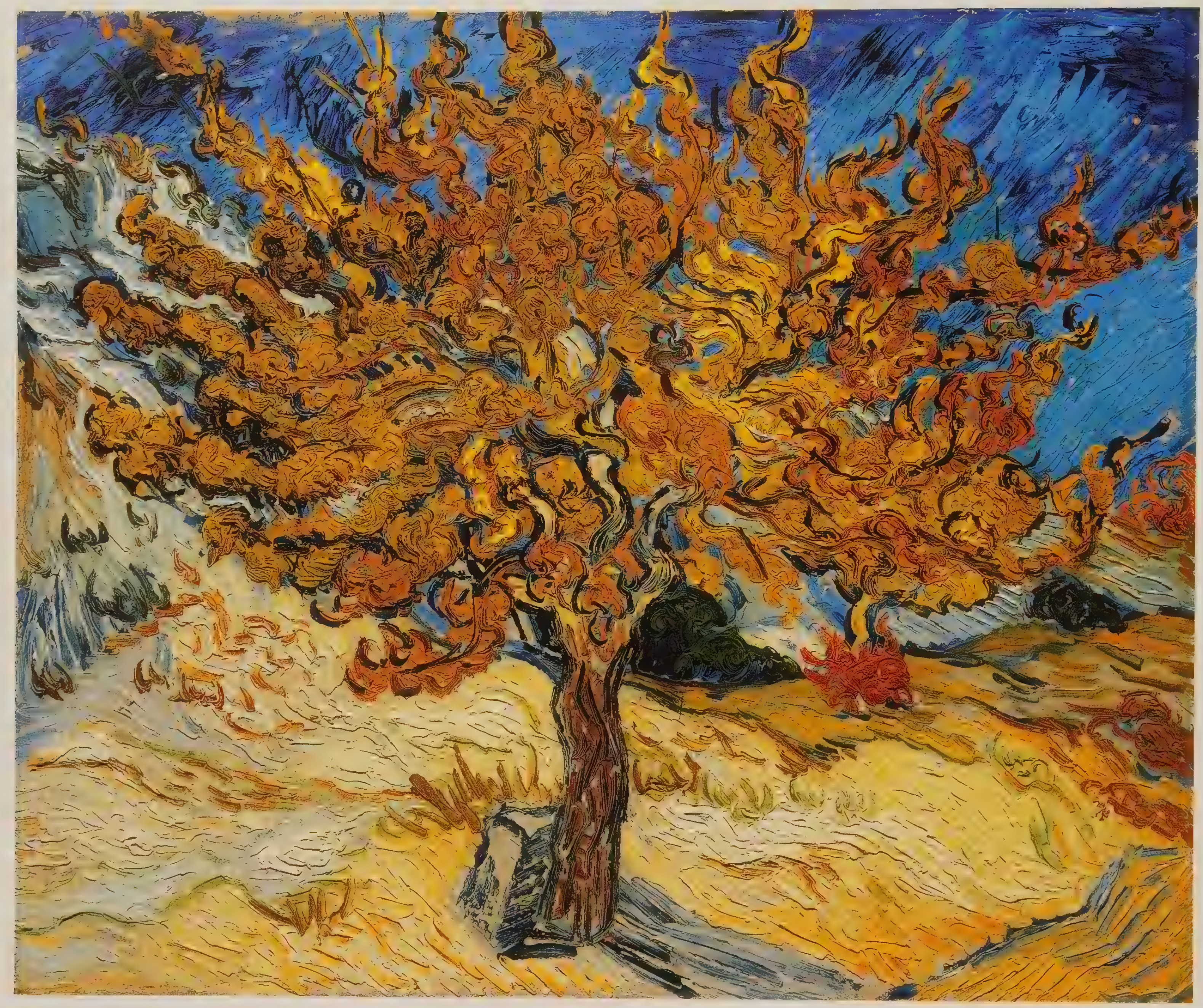
147
The ravine (Les Peiroulets)
1889
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

148
Cypresses with two figures
1889
oil on canvas
92 x 73 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

attention to the symbolic role of cypresses in his work – as important as sunflowers. This in turn led Van Gogh to reconsider this canvas, not yet sent to Theo in Paris. He felt Aurier had been perceptive: cypresses and sunflowers were indeed opposite and therefore complementary motifs. Notwithstanding his deep mistrust of psycho-biographical criticism, and despite certain specific caveats he had about Aurier's piece, notably its overinflation of his achievement, he decided to make some final adjustments to this canvas – including the addition of two figures – before sending it north as a thankyou gift to his new admirer.

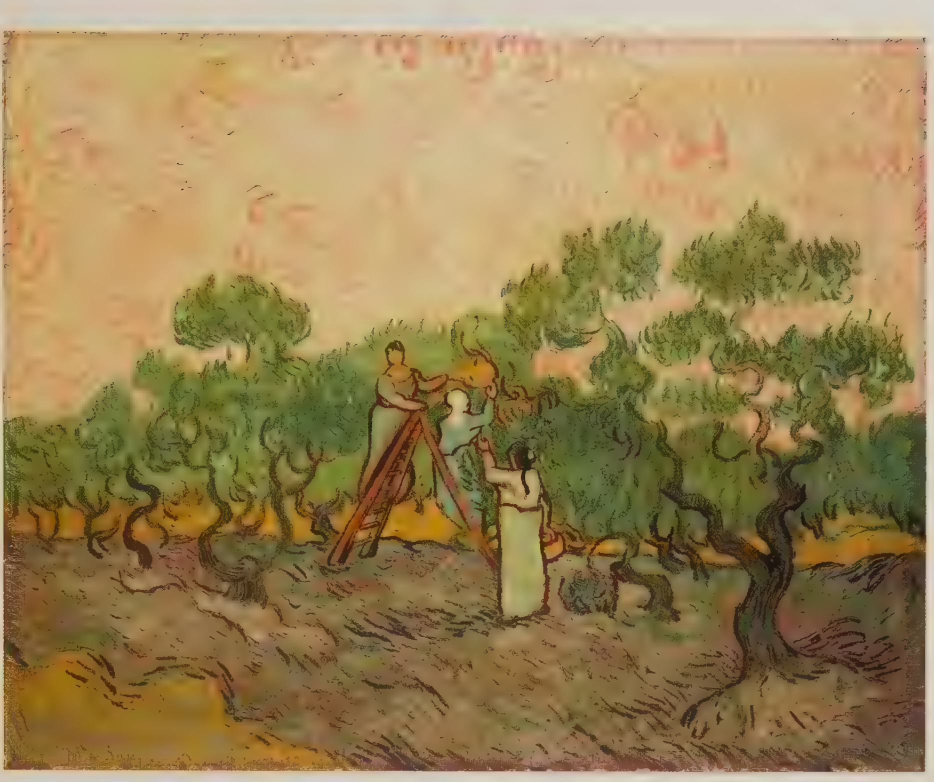
In November and December 1889 Van Gogh was once again preoccupied with painting olive groves. He was drawn back to them by the occasion of the harvest – performed mostly by women – when scenes of an inevitable



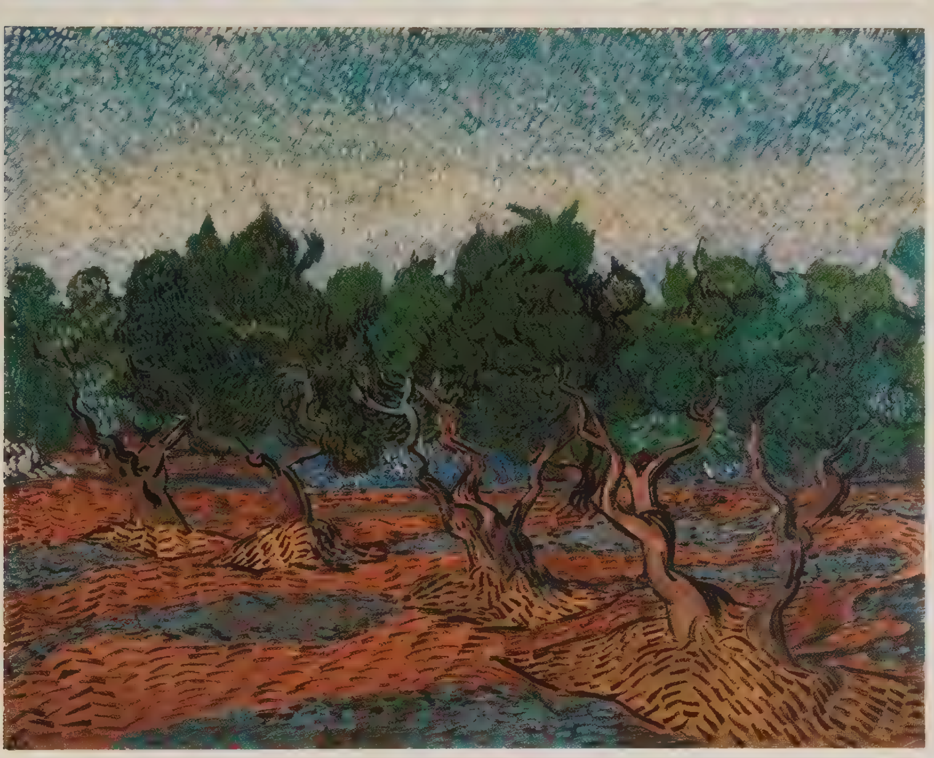


149
The mulberry tree
1889
oil on canvas
54 x 65 cm
Norton Simon Art Foundation,
Pasadena, California,
Gift of Mr. Norton Simon

classical resonance recalled for him the calm friezes of the contemporary decorative painter, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898). The canvases he painted at this time not only featured the women pickers – whose generalised clothing gave them a timeless quality – but several were conceived with his mother and sister in mind. Writing to Theo about his most considered version (ill. 150), he explained that it was done from memory after a study of the same size made on the spot, and that it was the fruit of a protracted spate of work on the theme. The colours were carefully planned: 'the ground is violet, and, farther off, yellow ochre; the olives with bronze trunks have grey green foliage, the sky is entirely pink, and three small figures pink too.' The fact that his handling is noticeably lighter and more airy in this

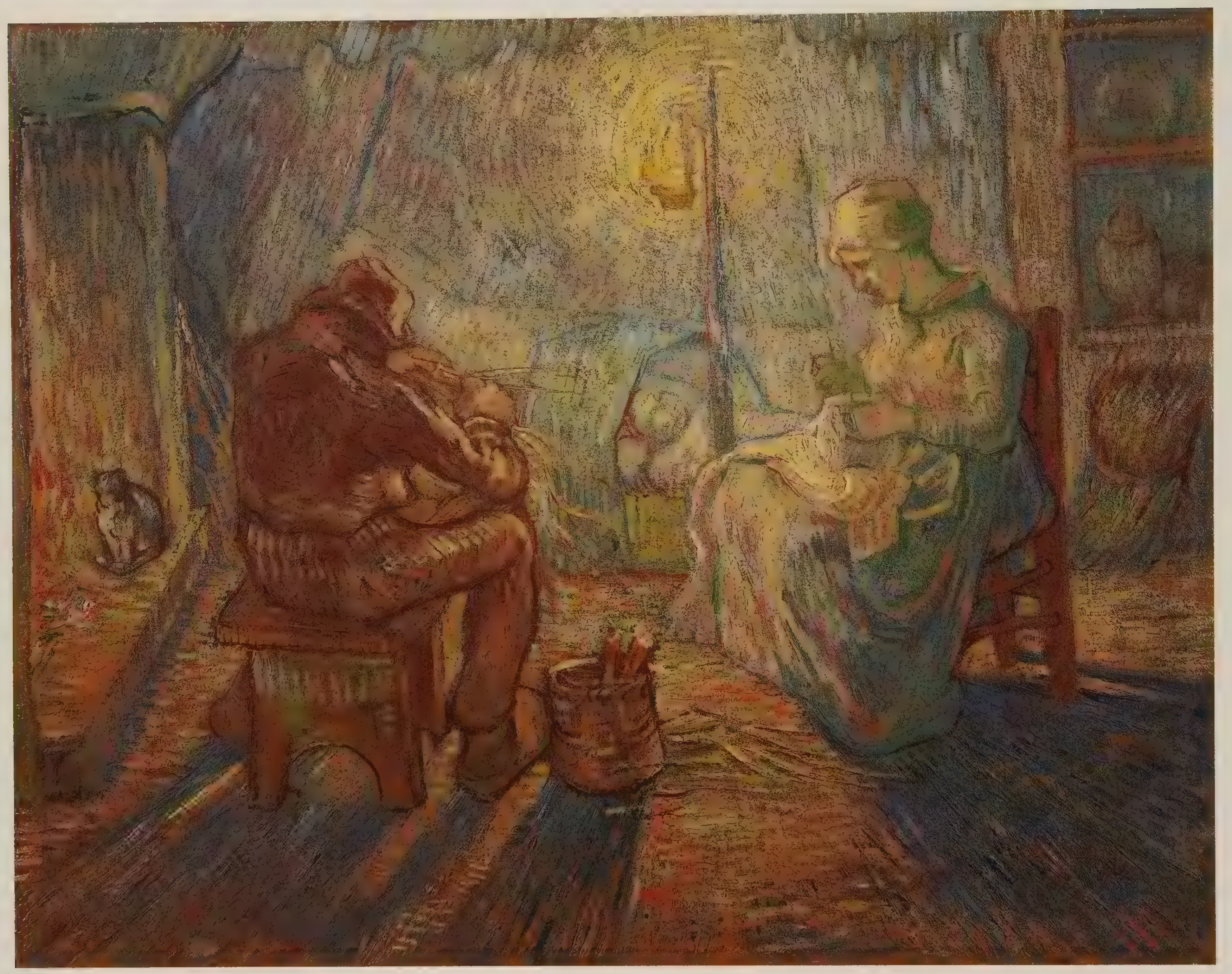


150
Women picking olives
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York



151
Olive grove
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

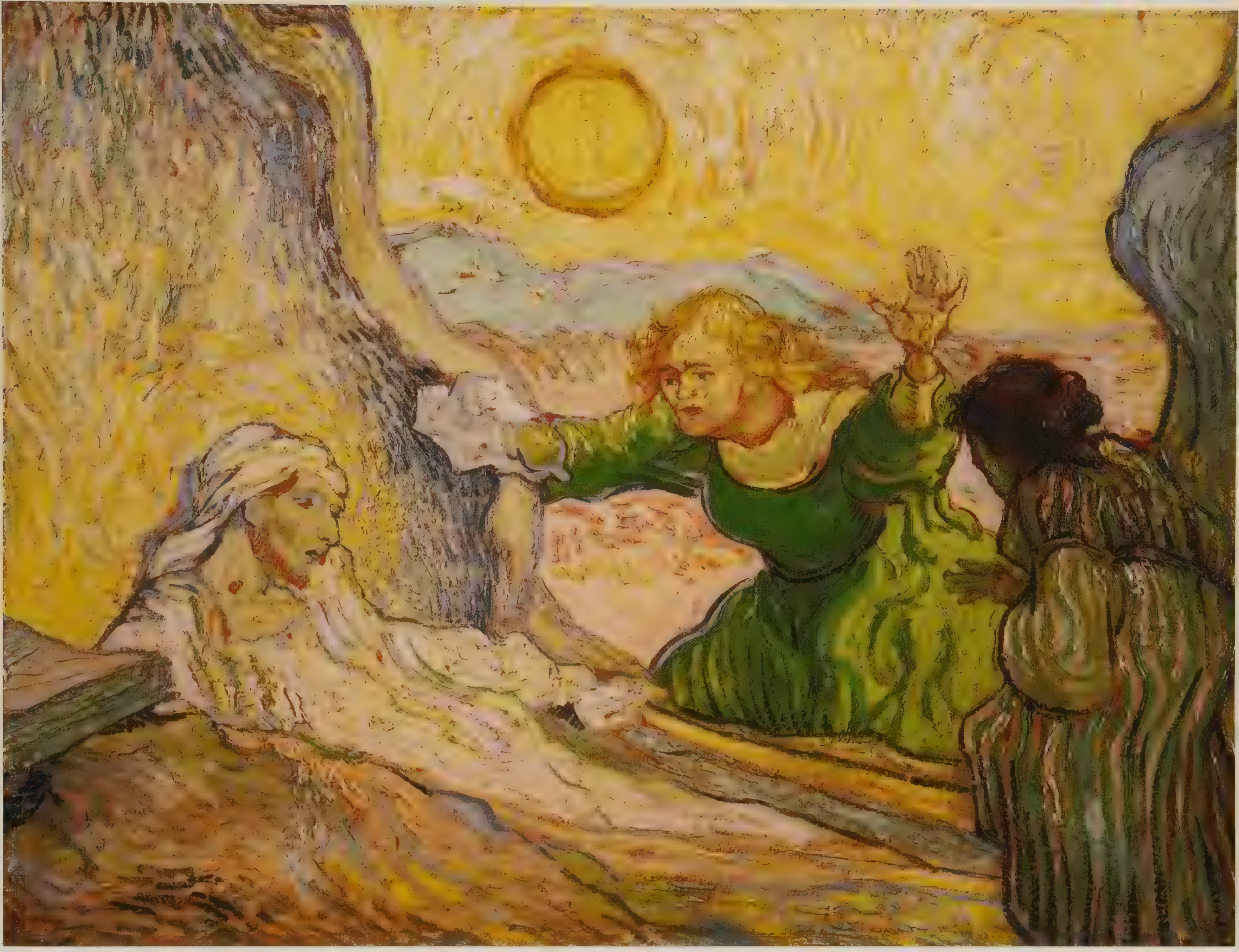
canvas was deliberate, a response to certain criticisms Theo had made. Van Gogh conceded that he had been allowing his impastos to become overheavy. Tellingly, he linked his way of working to his own growing sense of calm and control: 'I think that probably I shall do hardly any more things in impasto it's the result of the calm secluded life I am leading and I feel all the better for it. Fundamentally I am not so violent as all that, at any rate I feel more *myself* in a calm atmosphere.' [830/617] Another motivation for mak-



152
Night
(after Millet's 'La veillée')
1889
oil on canvas
72 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

ing these faithful observations of the olive harvest was his ongoing dispute with Gauguin and Bernard, both of whom had been allowing their imaginations to run wild and painting scenes of Christ in the garden of olives, probably, in Bernard's case, without ever having seen an olive tree! Although the garden of Gethsemane theme was one that he had been tempted by himself, Van Gogh now felt it was a misguided direction in which to be taking art: it was unjustified, since nature offered all the pretext one could possibly need if one wanted to convey the sadness of Christ's betrayal.

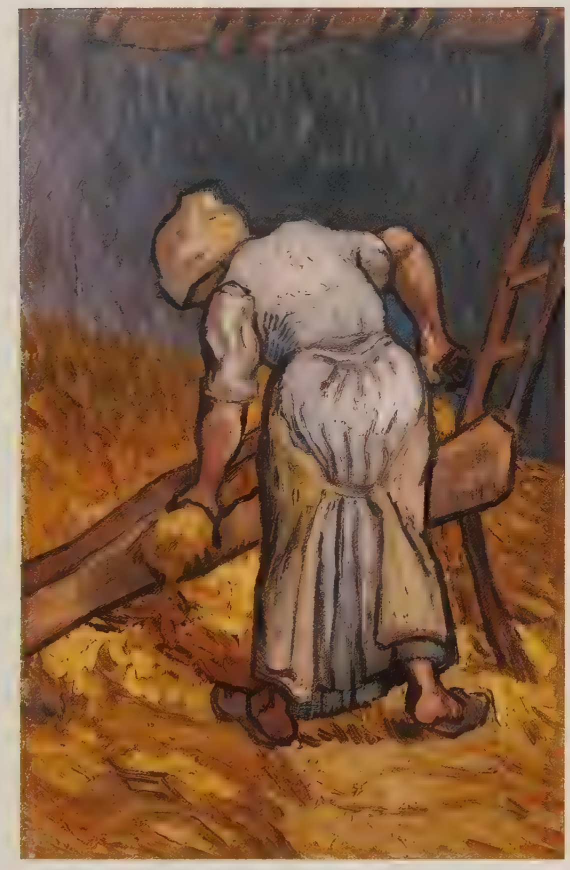
CREATIVE COPYING On learning in September 1889 that his brother's wife was expecting a child, Van Gogh's emotions seem to have been mixed. He wrote to Theo, 'I hope […] that the family will be for you what nature, the lumps of soil, the grass, the yellow wheat, the peasant, are for me, in



153
The raising of Lazarus
(after Rembrandt)
1890
oil on canvas
48 x 63 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

other words, that you find in your love for people something *not only to work for,* but to comfort and restore you when you need it.' [801/604]. This is one of Van Gogh's clearest statements of his quasi-religious devotion to nature, which now offered the consolation he had previously found in Christianity. At the same time, it shows him to be sadly aware that the idealised hopes he had earlier nurtured – of romantic love, fatherhood and family life – were no longer realisable; all had been subsumed into his work.

Van Gogh felt visually deprived in Saint-Rémy, and as his need for communion with the work of artists he admired returned forcefully, he urged Theo to keep him supplied with reproductions from which to make copies. The way he rationalised this practice of creative copying – translating black-and-white graphic works into colourful oils – was as a relaxation similar to that experienced by a composer who, tired of racking his brain for new musical ideas, turns instead to playing and reinterpreting another musician's work.



But the practice had deeper ramifications for Van Gogh. It was a way of trying out complex figurative compositions that he felt incapable of inventing; it also allowed him to explore religious and biblical subjects, like the *Pietà* or the raising of Lazarus, which had emotional and personal resonance. It is surely significant that in interpreting Delacroix's *Pietà* he gives the figure of Christ a red beard and hair, and that his Lazarus, a motif he adapted from a small section of a Rembrandt etching, has his own gaunt features and colouring (ill. 153, 155).

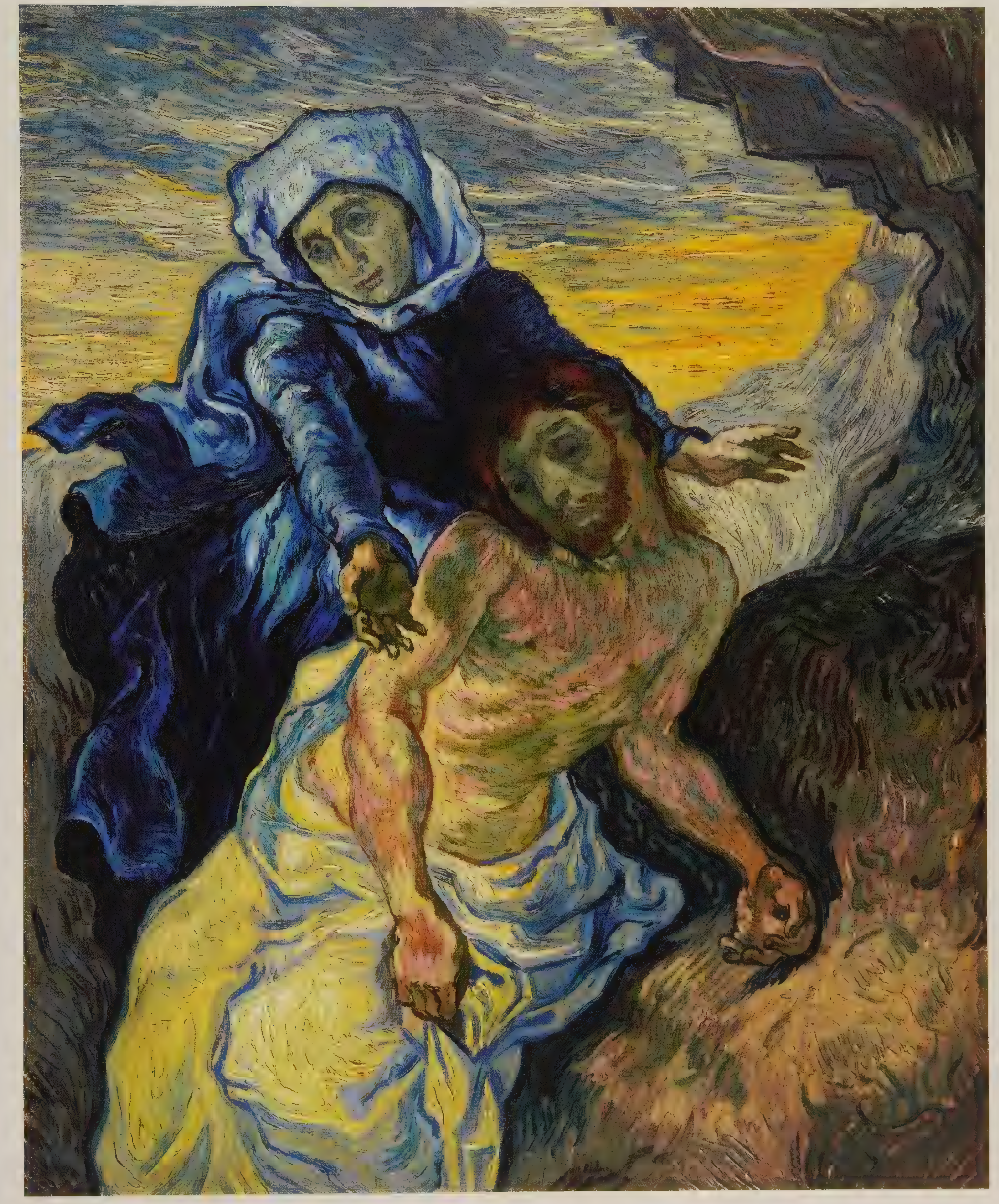
Copying was also a pretext for exploring tender human emotions. The Millet-inspired images like *Peasant woman bruising flax* (ill. 154) and *Night* (ill. 152), respectively based on the print series 'The Labours of the Fields' and 'The Four Times of the Day', served to embody the social ideals Van Gogh had long cherished, of dignity and companionship achieved through work and of contented domestic bliss. In concentrating on painting copies of such consoling, even sentimental, subjects, Van Gogh was endorsing and seeking to disseminate the positive messages they contained – he wanted his pregnant sister-in-law Jo to see *Night*, for example – but he was also, unconsciously perhaps, trying to forget or rise above his own emotionally impoverished circumstances.

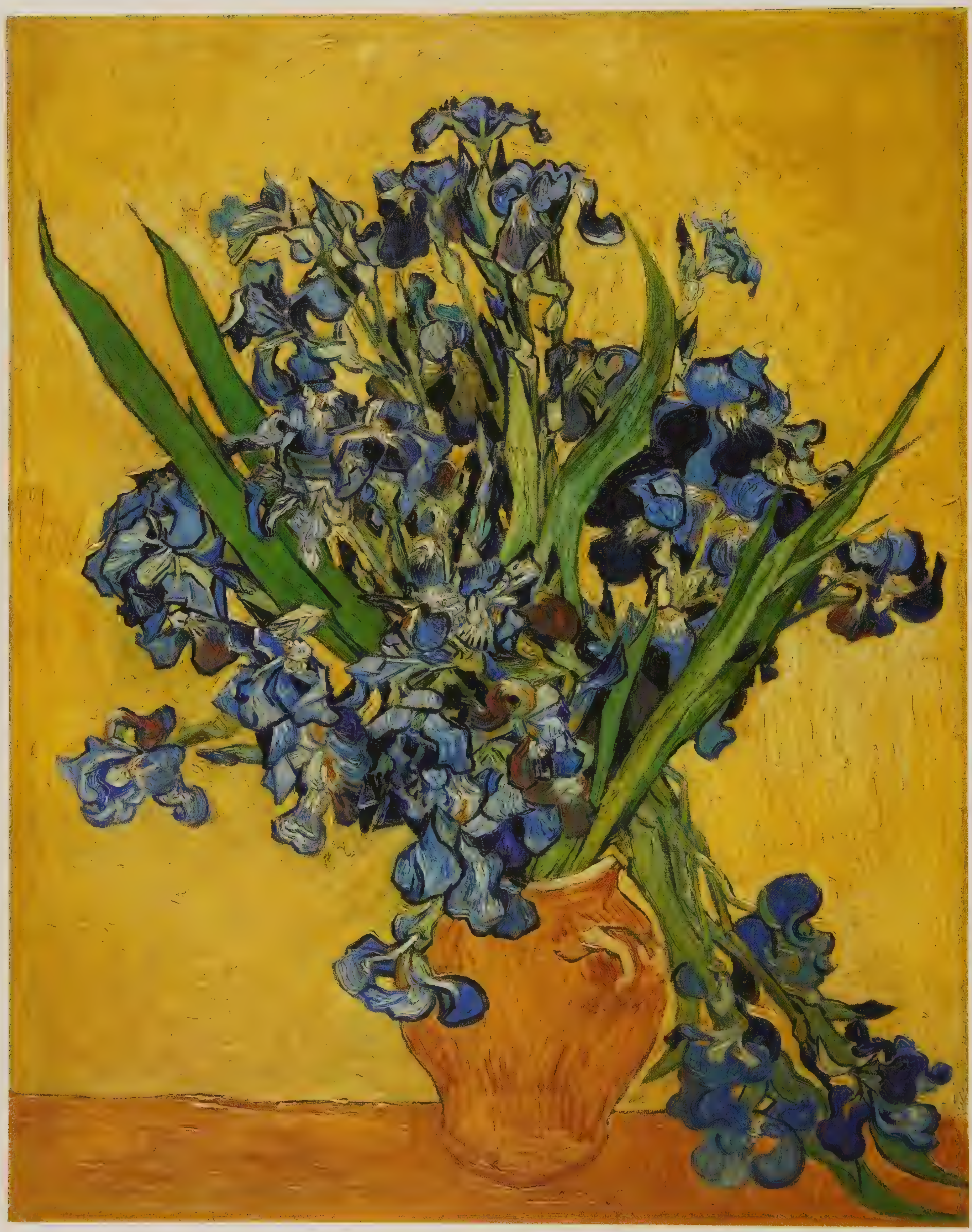
154
Peasant woman bruising flax
(after Millet)
1889
oil on canvas
40 x 25 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

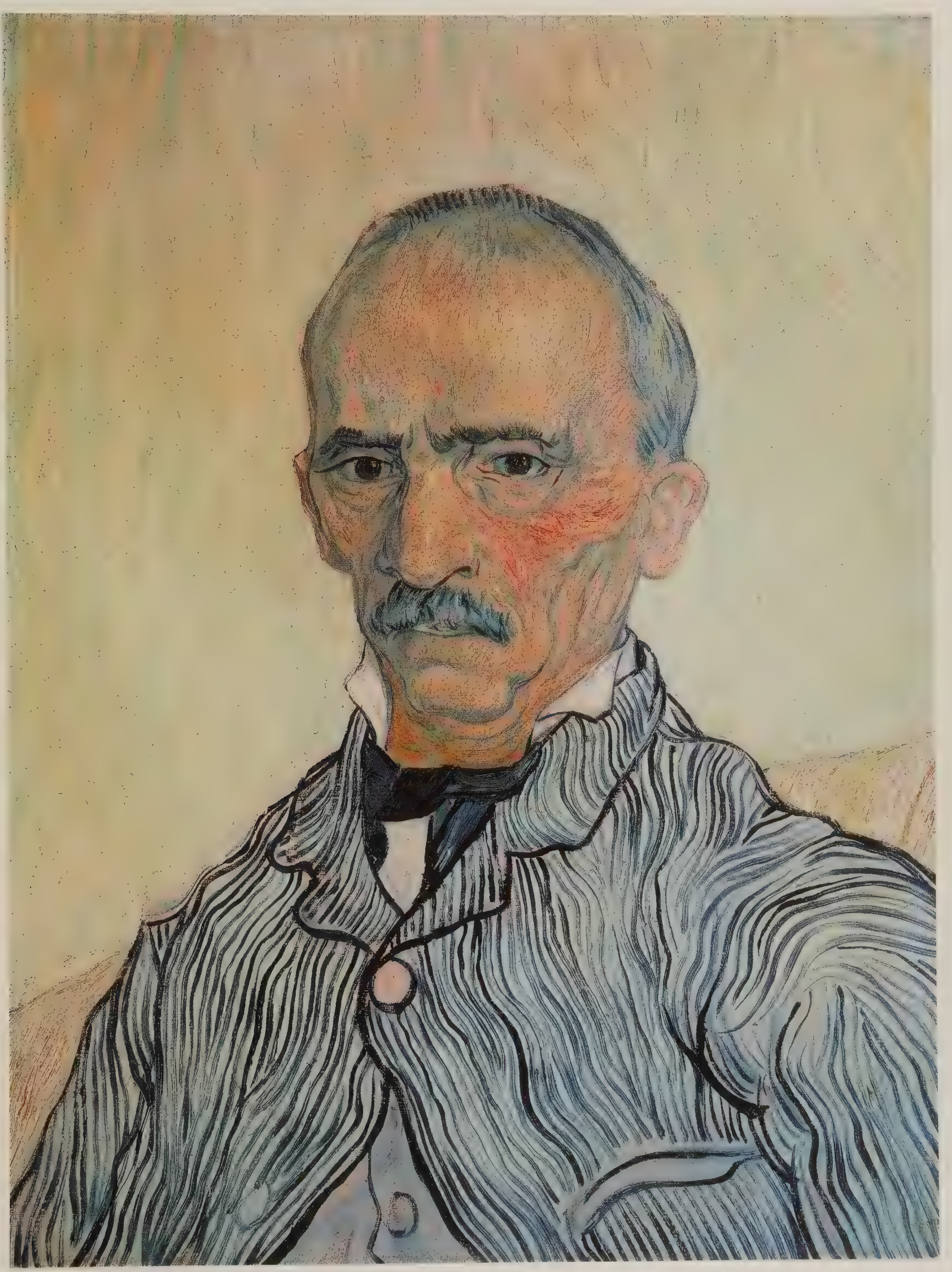
155
Pietà
(after Delacroix)
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 60 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

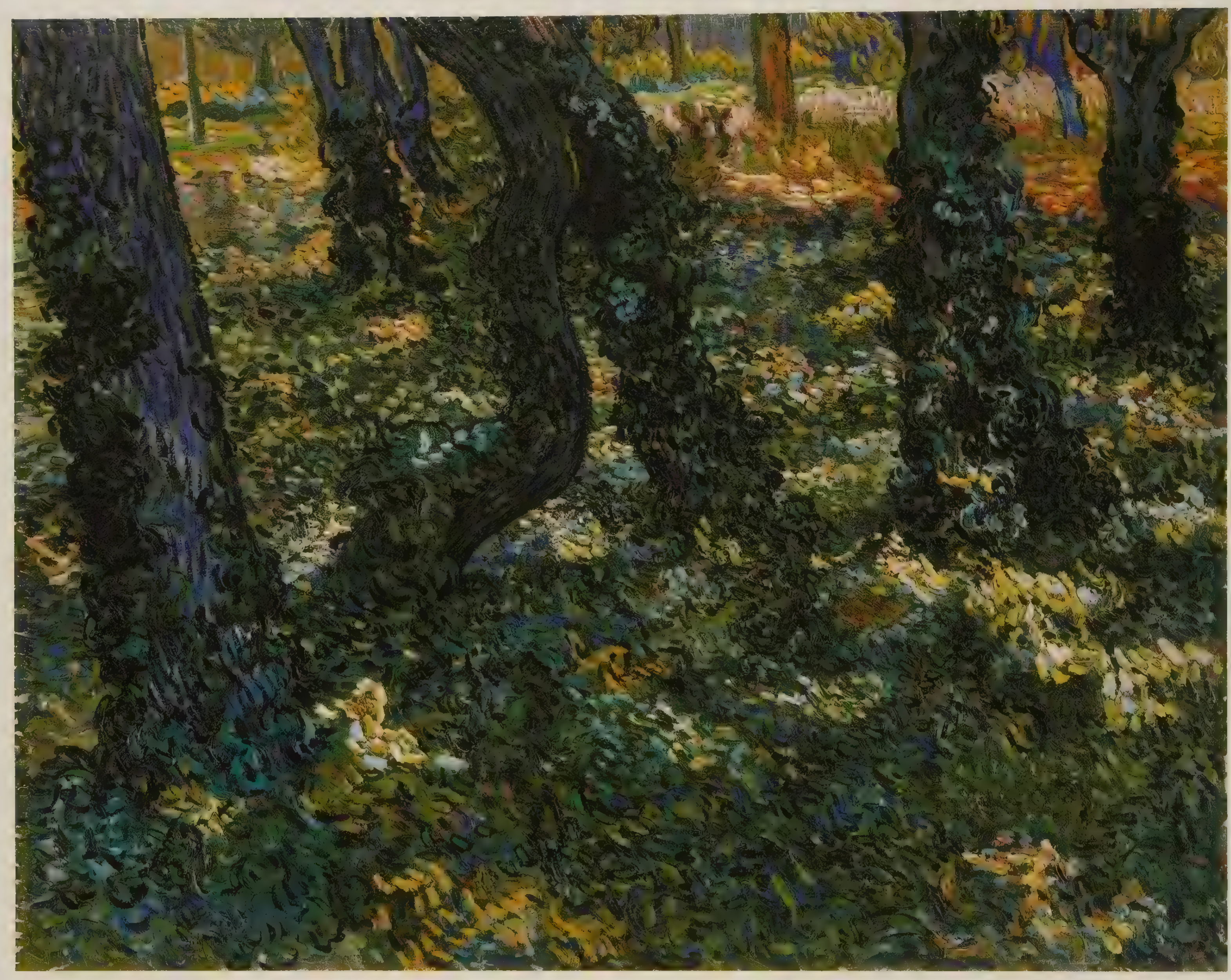
> 156
Irises
1890
oil on canvas
92 x 73 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

EXHIBITIONS AND COMING SUCCESS Between September 1889 and April 1890 Van Gogh allowed his work to be seen in public on three separate occasions, first at the Salon des Indépendants in Paris (held unusually late in 1889, so as to capitalise on the influx of visitors to the capital for the Universal Exhibition), then at *Les Vingt* in Brussels, and then again at the 1890 Indépendants. Submission to the Indépendants was at the individual's discretion, but limited for new members to two works – in 1889 Theo, on Vincent's behalf, sent just two paintings (ill. 110, 136), the 1888 version of *The starry night*, and *Irises*, a recent work. Inclusion at *Les Vingt*, on the other hand, was by invitation only; to receive a letter from the society's secretary, Octave Maus (1856-1919), represented a key moment of international recognition in the career of many artists. In making his selection of paintings for *Les Vingt*, Van Gogh was mindful of the effect the whole group would make in colouristic terms in the context of the exhibition, even if he did not plan this as competitively or strategically as Gauguin had done, in his presence, the previous year. He would be seen there with the still dominant Neo-Impressionists, but also with several Impressionists. The six works he chose comprised two sunflower paintings and four land-







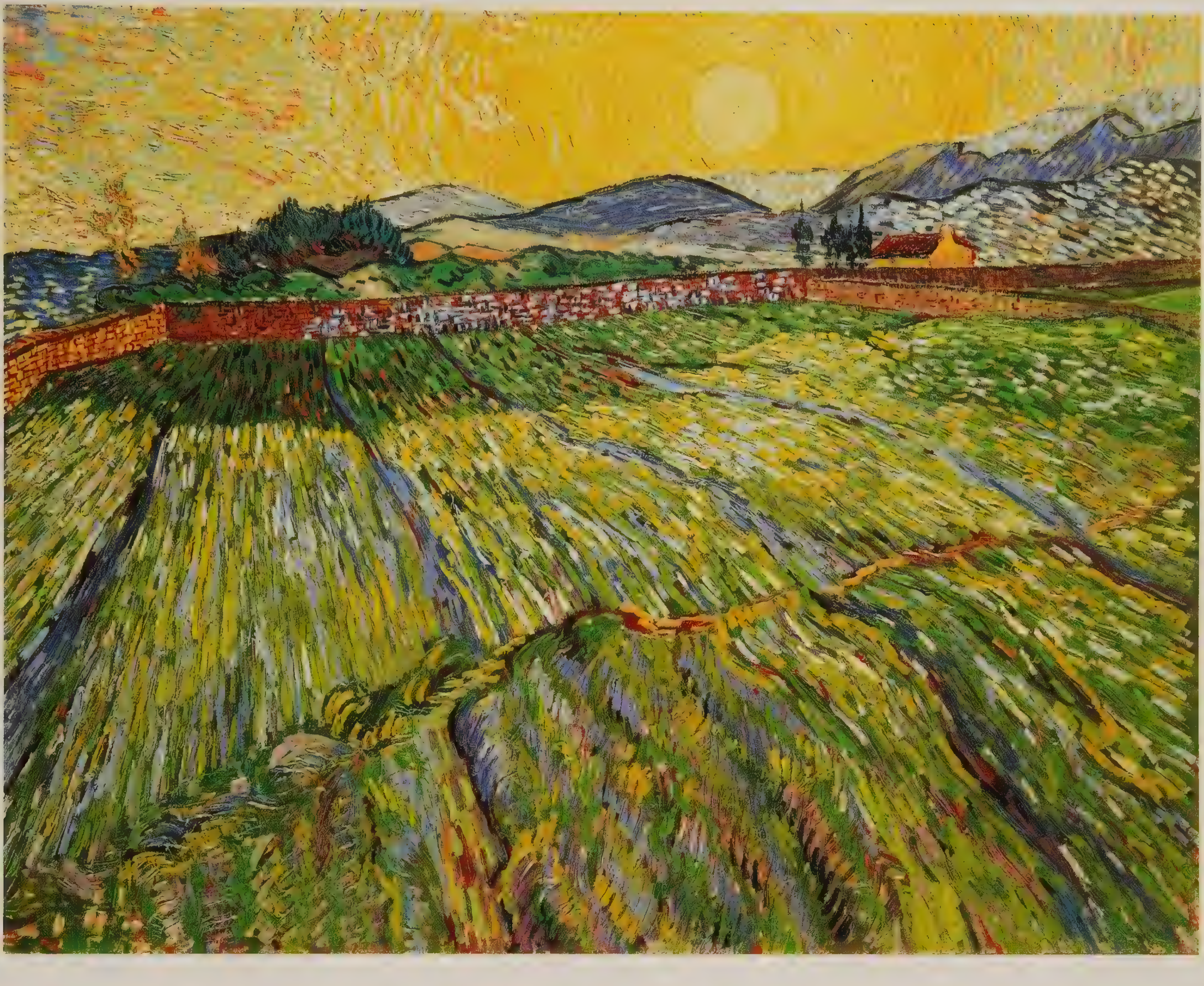


< 157
Portrait of Trabuc, attendant at the clinic
1889
oil on canvas
61 x 46 cm
Kunstmuseum, Solothurn, Dübi-Müller Foundation

158
Undergrowth
1889
oil on canvas
74 x 92 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

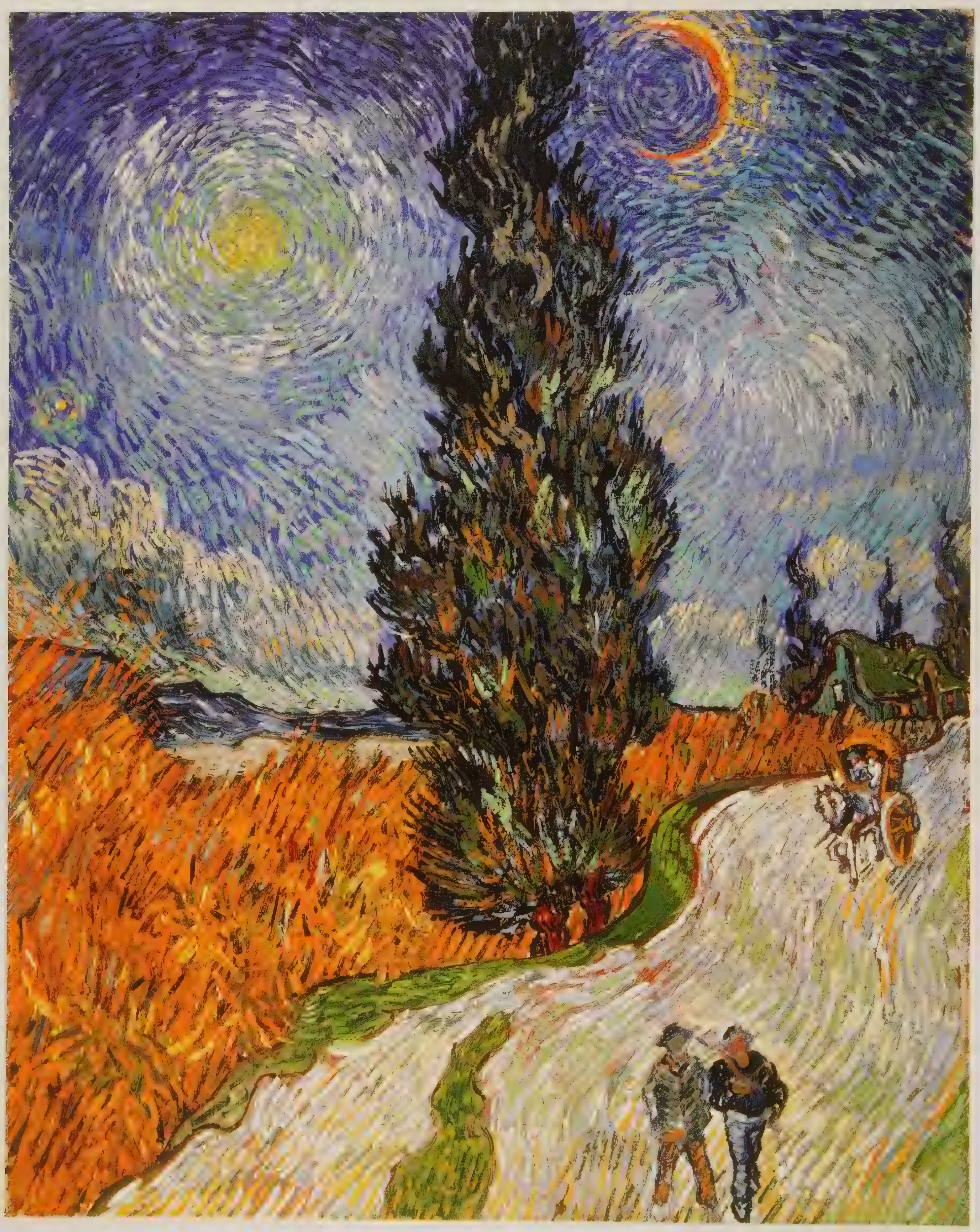
scapes, two from Arles (ill. 122, 135) and two from Saint-Rémy: one view showed an ivy-clad tree trunk in the garden, another the walled field he could see from his window, again with a low rising sun but without a reaper (ill. 159). For the Indépendants in Paris in spring 1890 Van Gogh submitted the full complement of ten works, a clear indication of the brothers' feeling that the time for proper exposure of Vincent's achievement as a painter had come. What was consistent about the works Van Gogh chose to exhibit was the emphasis on landscape and the omission of portraiture. He was clearly still more confident of his strengths as a painter of nature than as a figure painter.

Theo was able to relay positive news on 22 January 1890: 'It seems that the exhibition of the *Vingt* at Brussels is open; I read in a paper that the canvases which arouse the curiosity of the public the most are the open-air



159
Landscape with rising sun
1889
oil on canvas
73 x 92 cm
Private collection

study by Cézanne, the landscapes by Sisley, the symphonies by Van Gogh and the works of Renoir. [...] I think we can wait patiently for success to come; you will surely live to see it. It is necessary to get well known without obtruding oneself, and it will come of its own accord by reason of your beautiful pictures.' [844/T25] He either omitted to mention, or was himself unaware, that a furore had been caused by Van Gogh's paintings, which almost led to a duel at the opening between the *Vingtiste* Henri de Groux and Toulouse-Lautrec, who with the backing of Signac loyally came to the defence of Van Gogh's work. Famously, Van Gogh sold one painting in Brussels: *Red vineyard at Montmajour* (ill. 122) was bought by Anna Boch (1848-1936), the elder sister of his friend Eugène Boch, who was also exhibiting. It was not his only sale, nor his first, but it was significant. In fact, although they never met, Van Gogh already knew of Anna Boch as the only



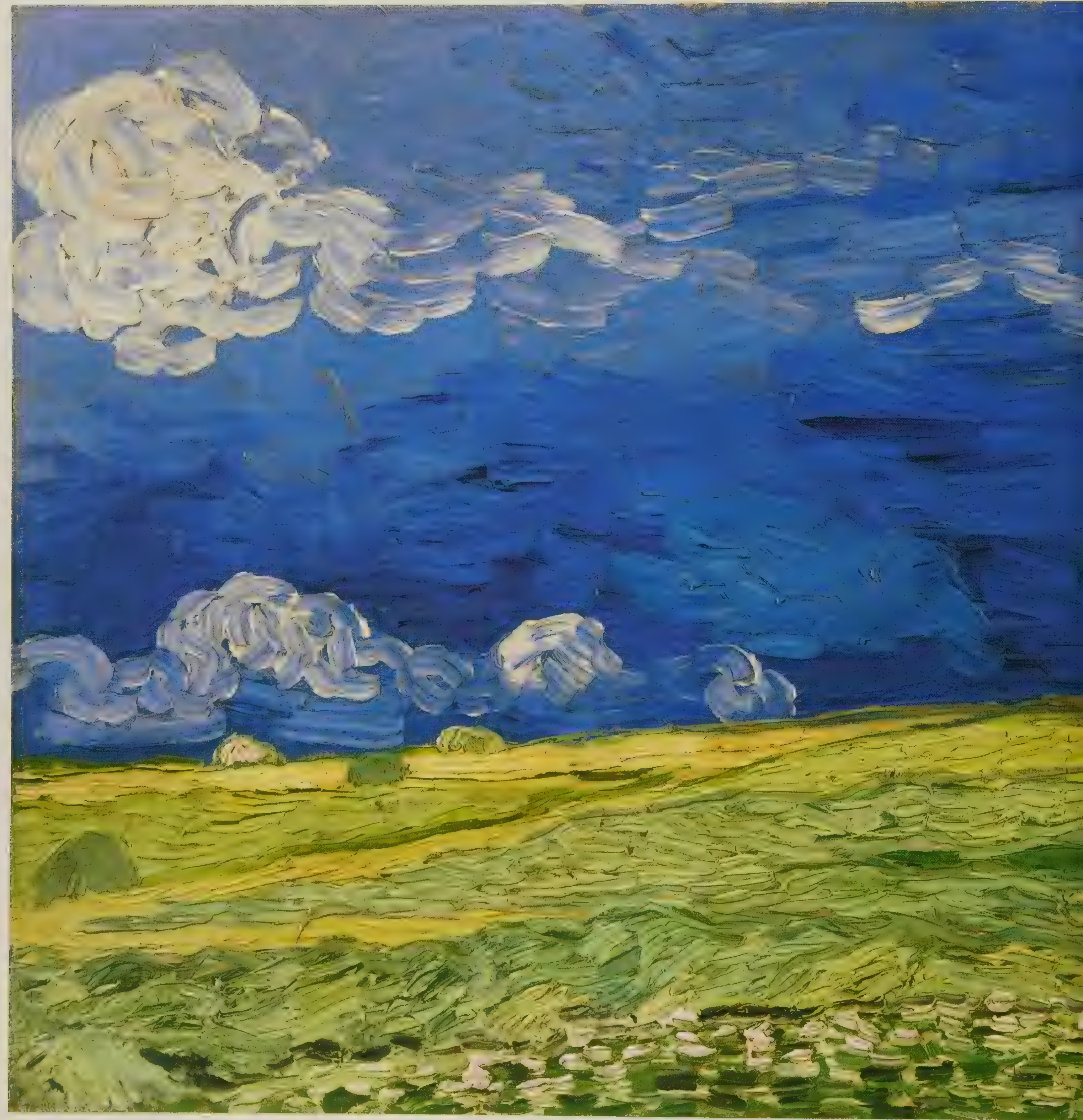
female painter to belong to the *Vingtistes*. Granted the price she paid was low and the personal connection may have favoured him, but the news of the sale, full details of which he received only in May, should have given him a considerable fillip. Selling abroad to a well-connected and potentially influential artist of talent (she was Octave Maus's cousin) and, moreover, to a woman was gratifying proof that his work could appeal across national and gender barriers.

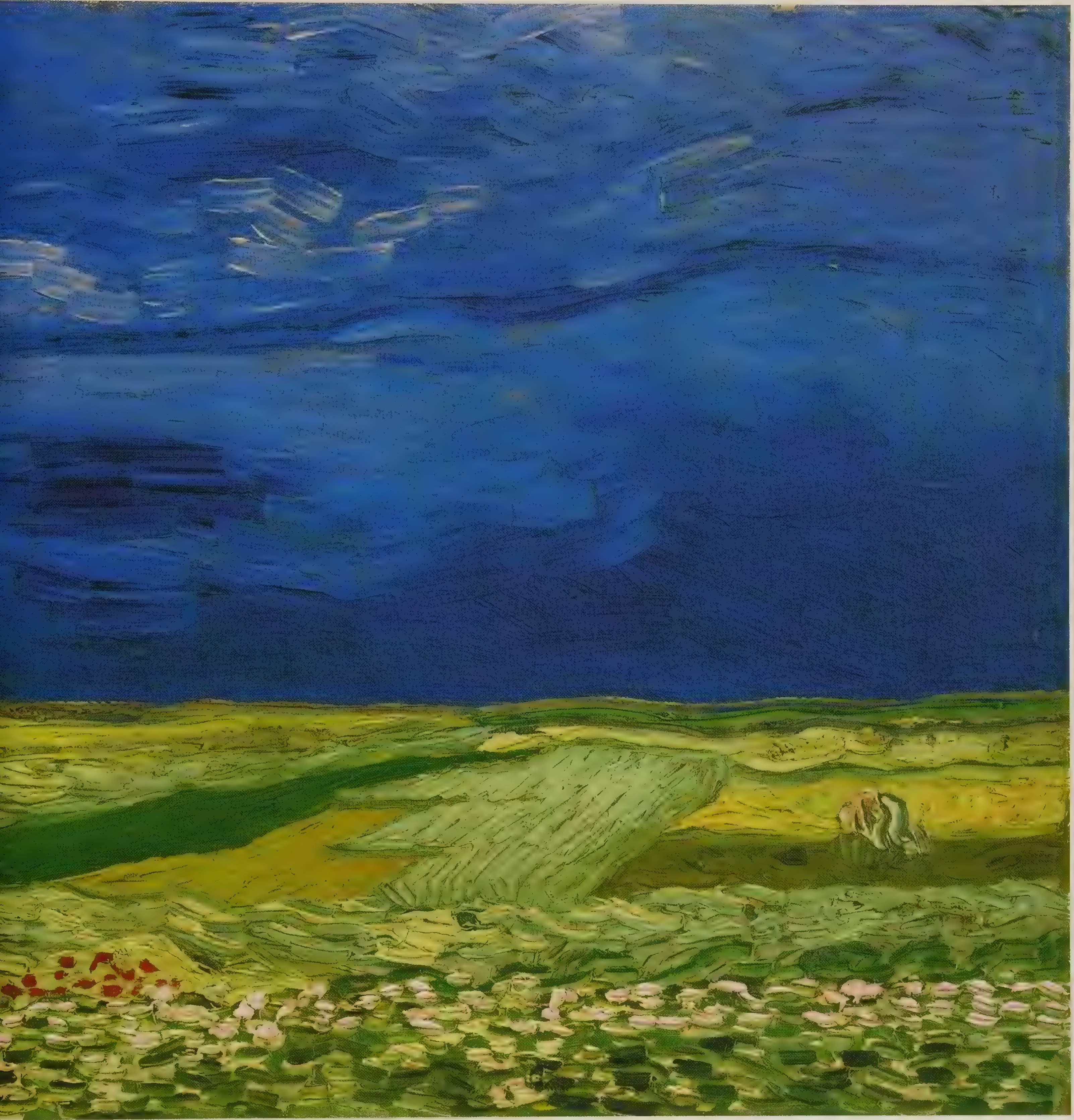
AUVERS-SUR-OISE Van Gogh had for some time intended to return to the north. In May 1890, shortly after painting a last majestic nocturnal landscape (ill. 160) – a kind of résumé of his Provençal experiences – that wish was realised. However, Theo's hopes of getting him back to Paris in time to see the Indépendants exhibition proved impossible to achieve. Throughout March and April Van Gogh was in total collapse, unable to work; it was his longest period of incapacity to date, and the breakdown was apparently triggered by a visit to the Ginoux couple in Arles. What brought on these attacks is impossible to judge. Was the elating yet disturbing news that his work was gradually reaching an audience, the prospect of increasing exposure, too much for Van Gogh to take, impinging as it did on his year-long period of seclusion? Yet down that route lay his best hope of realising his aim of repaying the immense financial debt he felt he owed Theo. Coming north, he had hoped to live with Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), but instead the plan was to move him to Auvers-sur-Oise, where he could live under the watchful eye of Dr Paul Gachet (1828-1909), a homeopathic medical practitioner who was also an amateur painter and etcher. En route for Auvers, Van Gogh passed through Paris and briefly returned to the bosom of his family. He met, at long last, his new sister-in-law, Jo, and his four-month-old nephew and namesake, Vincent Willem, whose birth in January he had celebrated with one of the most joyous and purely decorative compositions he ever painted, *Almond blossom* (ill. 140). More importantly, and perhaps overwhelmingly for Van Gogh's sense of his progress as an artist, he confronted the paintings he had been sending in regular batches to Theo. Not all of these were framed and hanging, of course; many were stacked under furniture. In order to house them, Theo had had to rent a separate apartment, and there were also quantities of canvases stored at Tanguy's.

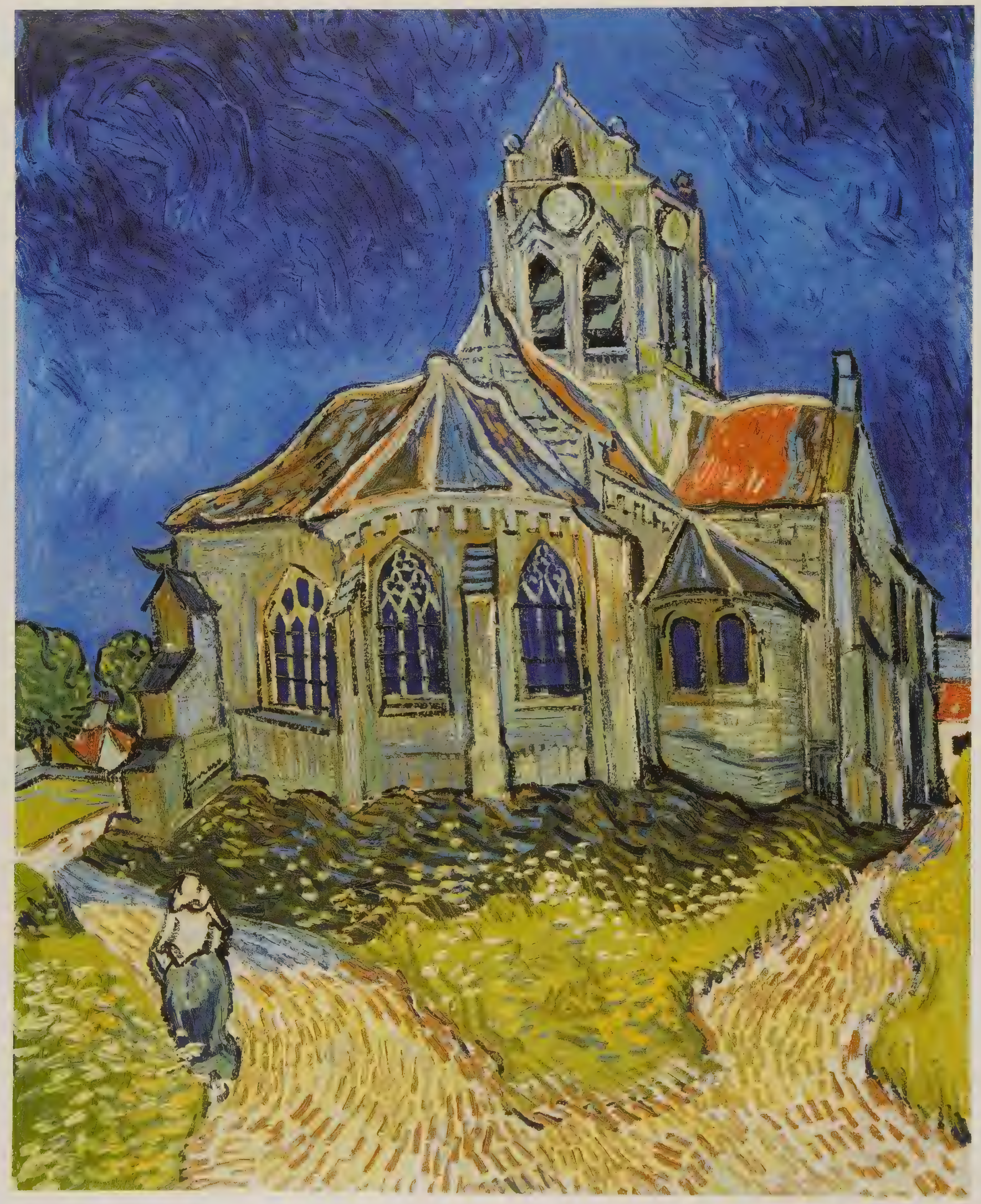
Auvers was a short train ride from Paris, but deep in the country. It had many artistic associations; indeed, the town today markets itself as 'the cradle of Impressionism'. Several generations of artists, predominantly landscapists, had worked there, notably Corot (1796-1875), Daubigny (1817-1878) and Daumier, followed in the 1870s by Pissarro, Cézanne (1839-1906) and Guillaumin. Gachet, who cultivated friendships with artists, had known or knew most of them personally, so his house, collection and conversation

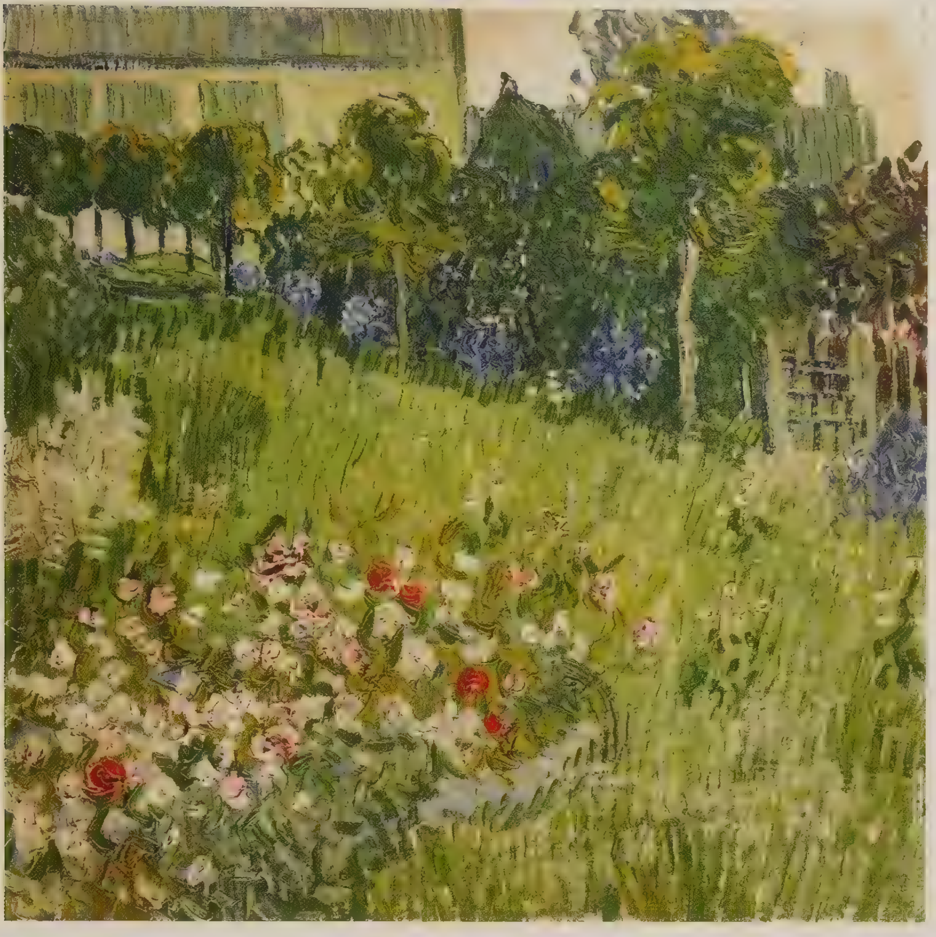
160
Country road in Provence by night
1890
oil on canvas
92 x 73 cm
Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo

> 161
Wheatfield under thunderclouds
1890
oil on canvas
50 x 100 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam







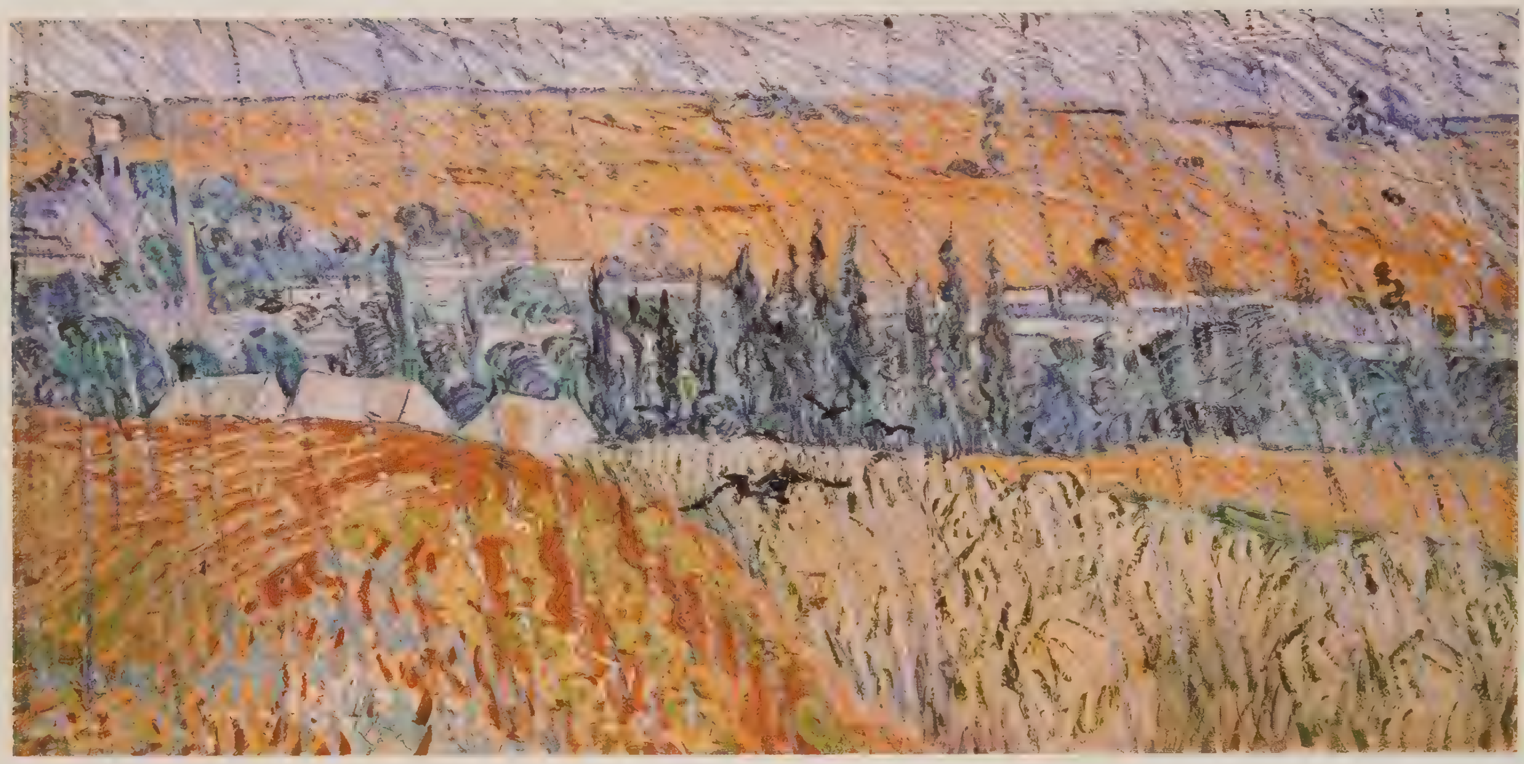


162
The church at Auvers
1890
oil on canvas
94 x 74 cm
Musée d'Orsay,
Paris

163
Daubigny's garden
1890
oil on canvas
51 x 51 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

revived not only the world of pictures for Van Gogh but many debates about the origins of Impressionism and its relationship to the earlier School of Barbizon. In Auvers Van Gogh certainly experienced a renewal of his old energy: the two months there saw him producing on average a painting a day. Several of the Auvers paintings are undoubted masterpieces, but he also turned out more works than before that one would have to classify as unfinished sketches or studies.

He was delighted that this rural setting had something of the character of the Brabant he remembered from childhood. The thatched cottages and farms, their roofs half covered with moss, reminded him of the 'little human nests' in Holland. Such rustic and picturesque motifs as *Farms near Auvers* (ill. 166) seem to belong organically to the landscape, and they suited Van Gogh's increasing tendency to distort and twist straight lines; the painting is unified by the blue/green colour harmony and by the rhythmic force of the brush working freely and graphically, scoring grooves in the wet paint layer. The painting's unusual horizontal format – a double square – is one Van Gogh particularly favoured in Auvers. It had been pioneered by Charles-François Daubigny specifically to accommodate his broad panoramic landscapes of the valley of the Oise (ill. 169). Indeed, Daubigny's house was a prominent feature of the village, and Van Gogh

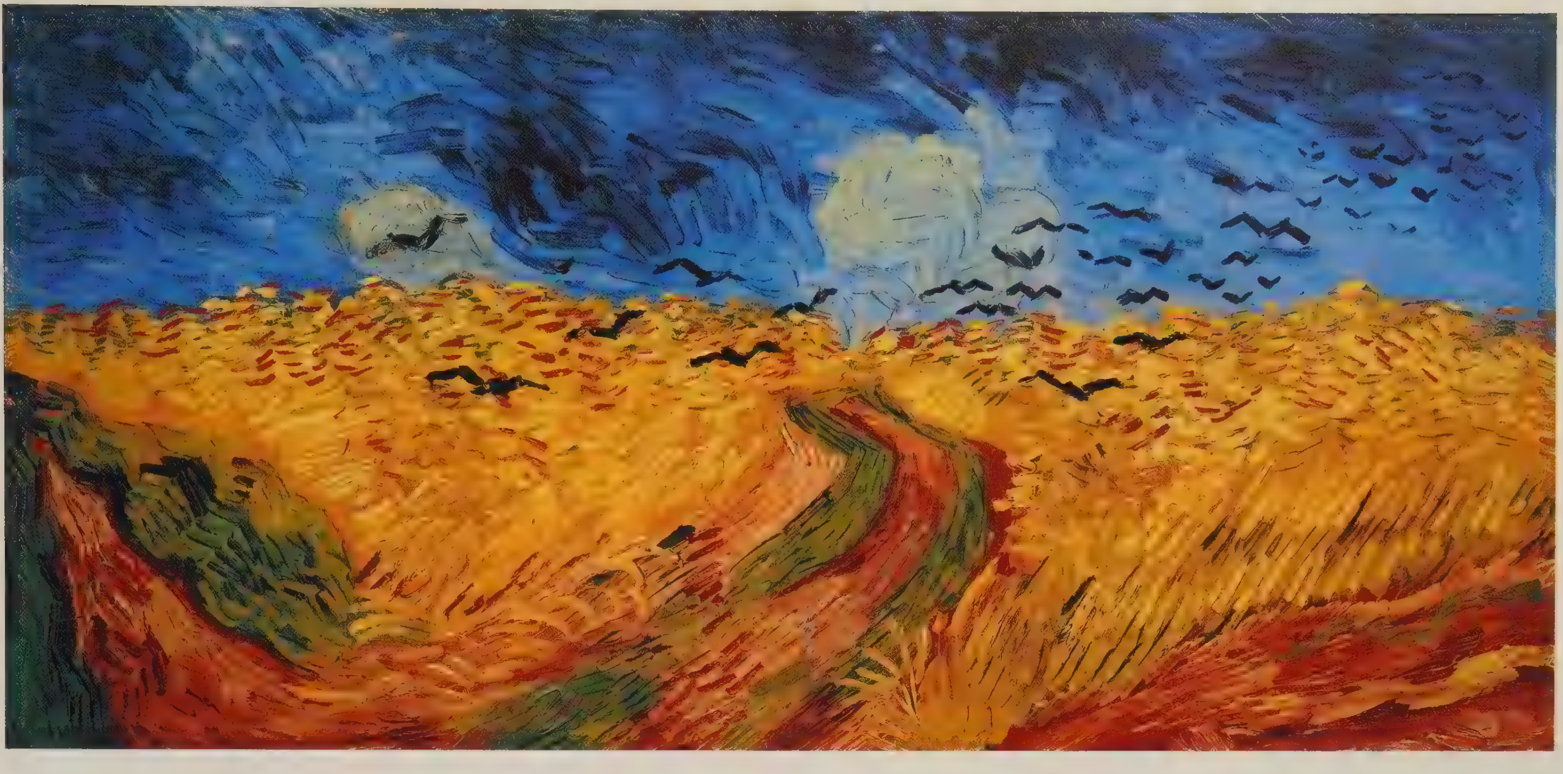


164
Landscape at Auvers in the rain
1890
oil on canvas
50 x 100 cm
National Museum of Wales, Cardiff

painted its garden on several occasions, using a square format for his impressionistic study (ill. 163), but a horizontal format for the definitive version, in which decorative considerations come to the fore (ill. 171). Another remarkable horizontal composition looks at this panoramic landscape through a veil of rain (ill. 164).

In upbeat mood, Van Gogh painted the two buildings that effectively symbolised French provincial life: the new republican town hall with flags flying, which he could see from his inn, and the medieval church, blue against an even bluer sky (ill. 162). This painting again revisits a theme remembered from Nuenen, the church tower. But a number of major canvases painted in July reflect a different mood (ill. 161, 165). They show the open meadows of the plateau stretching to the north of Auvers, whose vastness surely brought to mind the nuanced colouristic descriptions of La Beauce in Zola's *La Terre*. This panoramic scene, receptive to the changing moods of the weather, lent itself to pathetic fallacy, and in painting the canvases of the 'vast wheat fields under troubled skies' Van Gogh gave his troubled emotions free rein: 'I consciously tried to express sadness and extreme loneliness in them.' [903/649]

Meeting Dr Gachet reignited Van Gogh's ambitions as a portraitist, in part because the doctor was enthusiastic about two portraits the painter had with him (ill. 121, 146). He completed his first *Portrait of Dr Gachet* in the striated technique he had cultivated in Saint-Rémy, while the second, intended for the doctor, is painted in somewhat smoother blocks of colour (ill. 167). He was pleased to have imbued this haunting image with the 'heartbroken

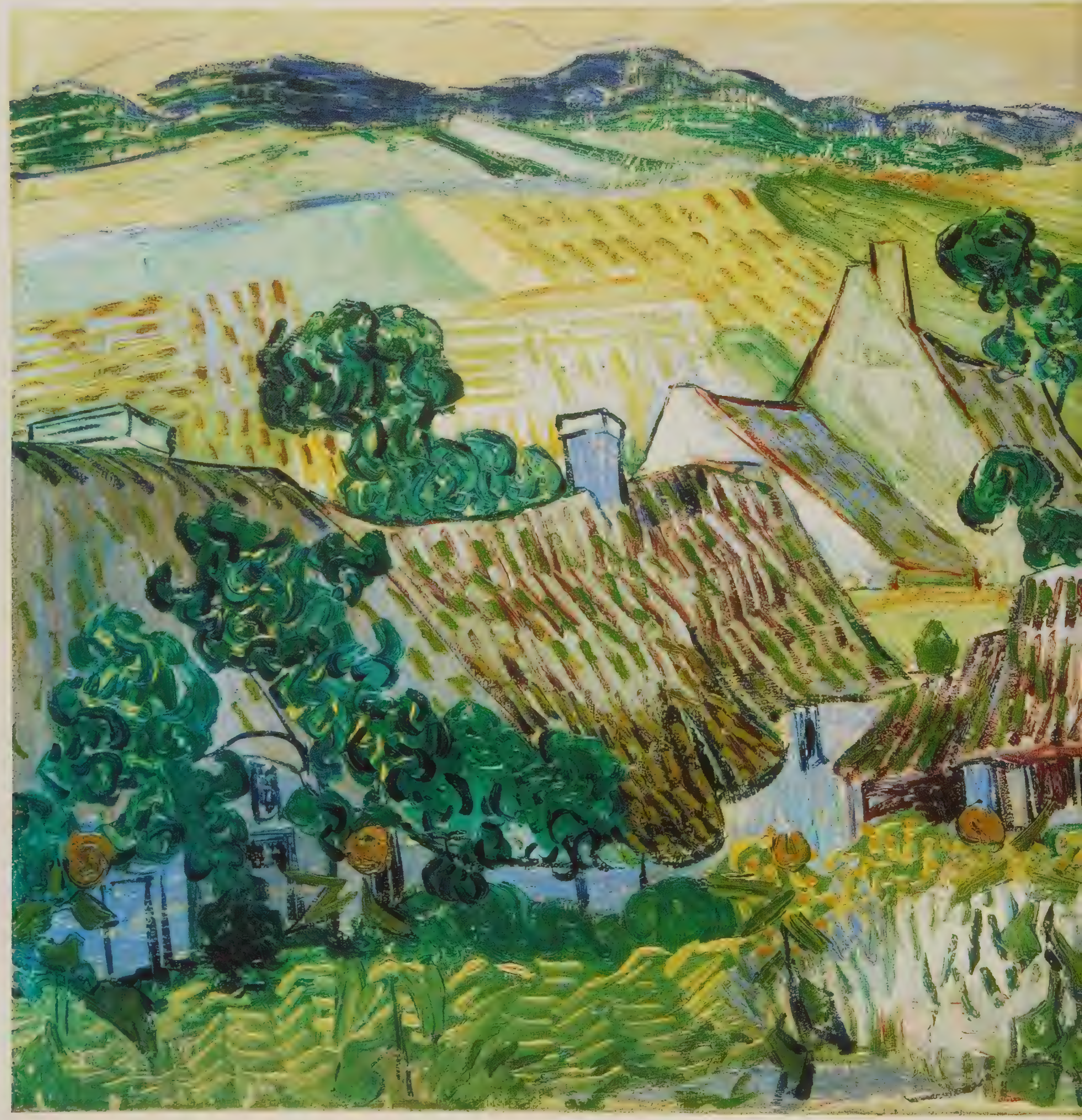


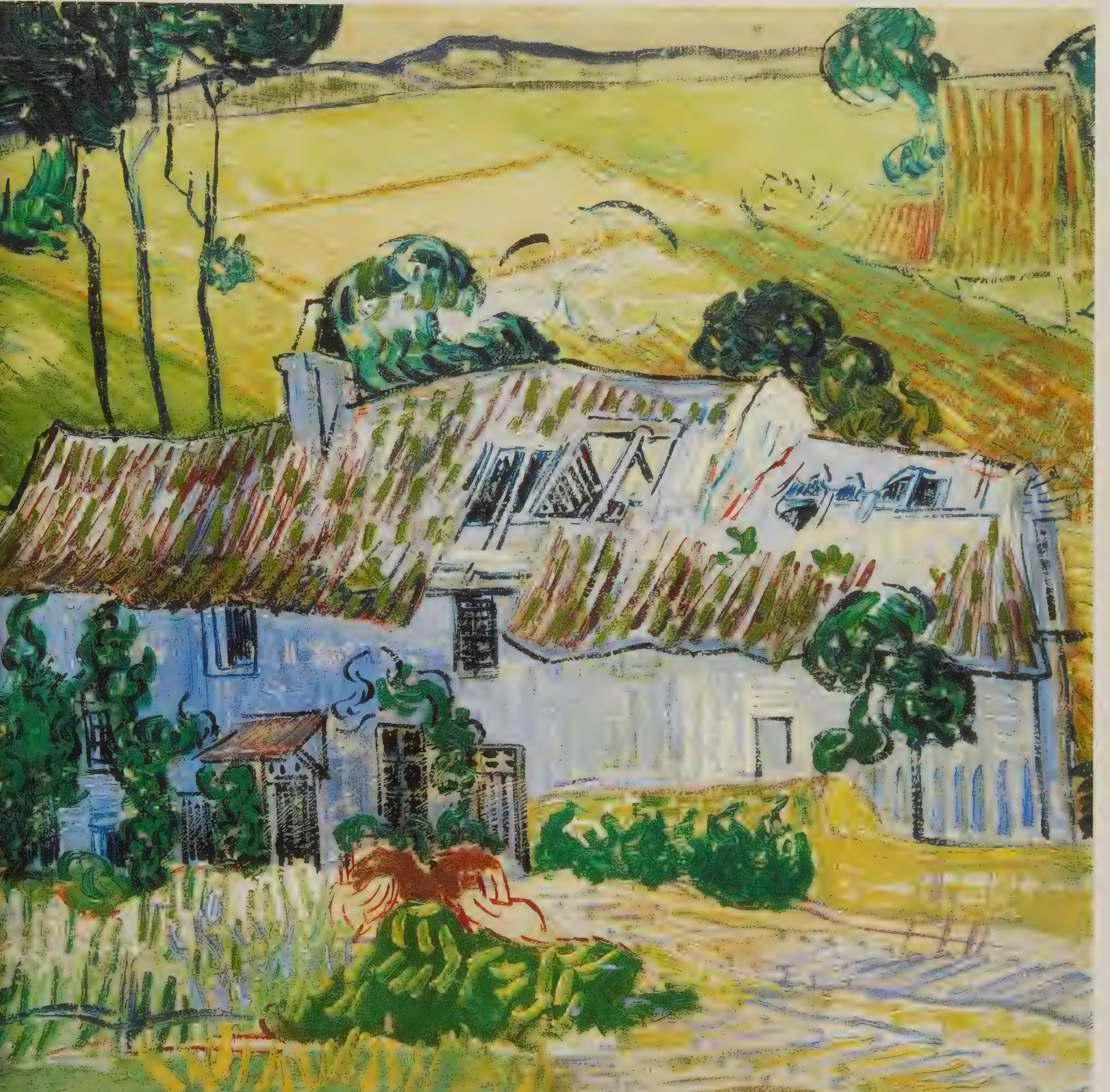
165
Wheatfield with crows
1890
oil on canvas
50 x 100 cm
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

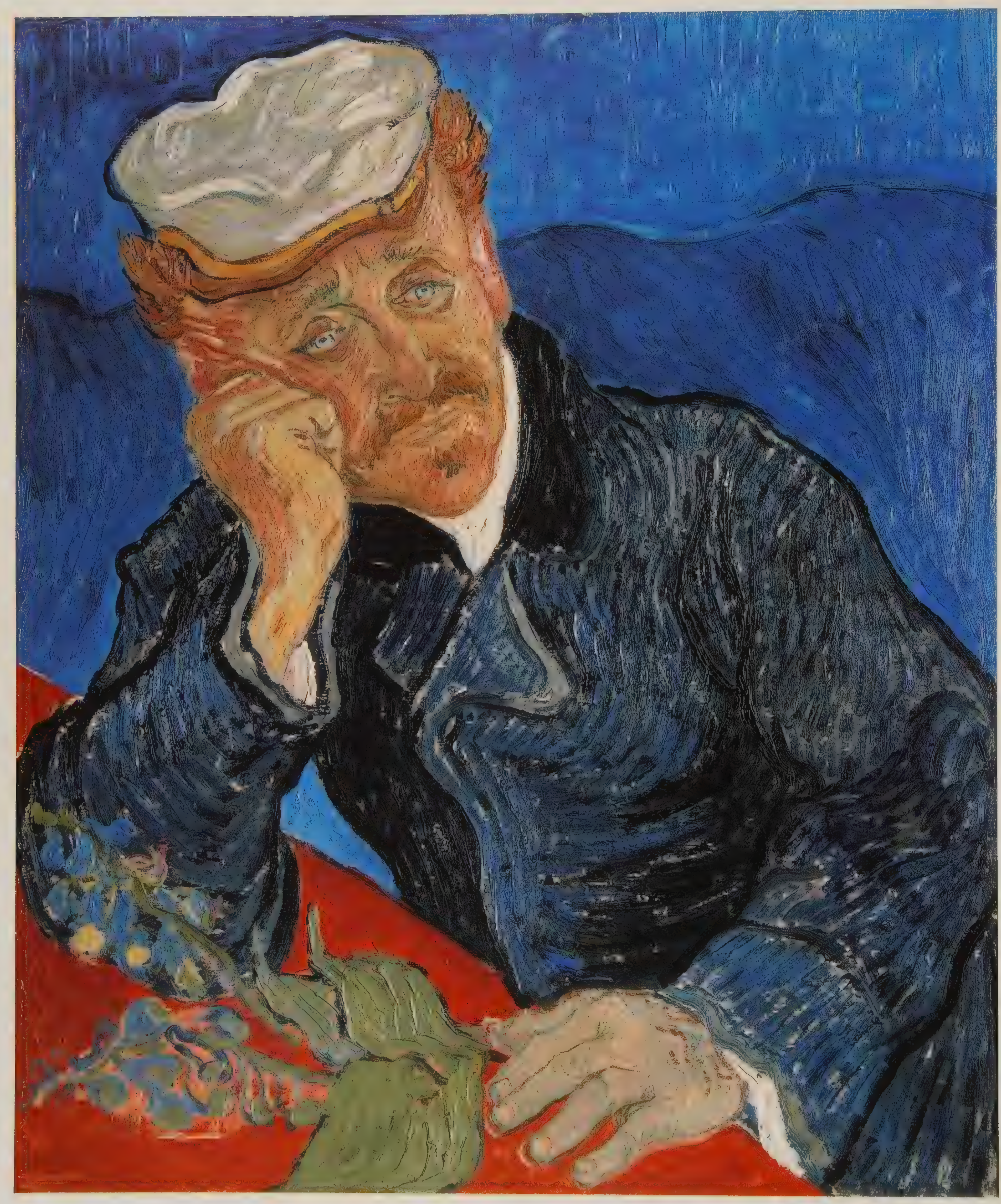
> 166
Farms near Auvers
1890
oil on canvas
50 x 100 cm
Tate, London

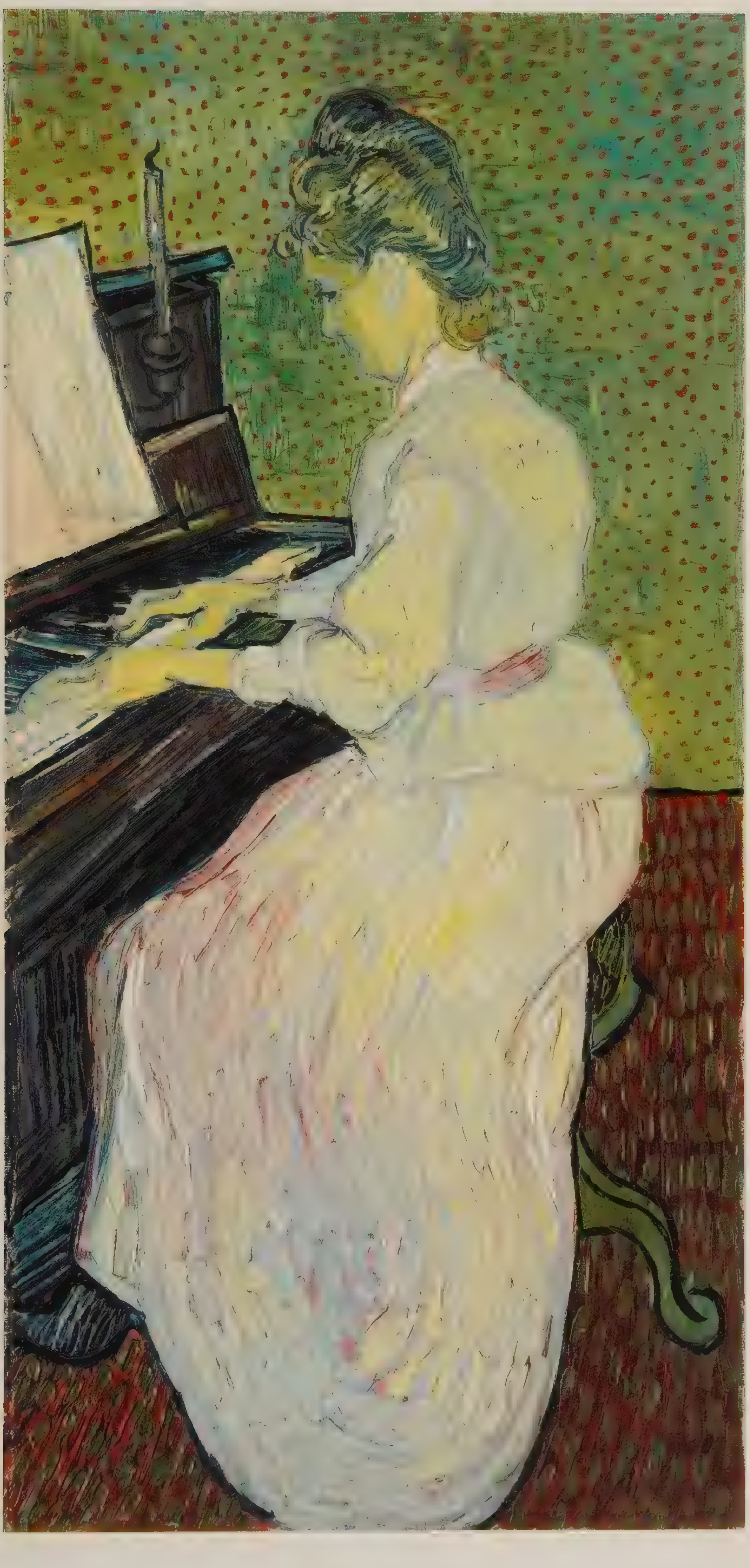
expression of our time' [893/643]. Soon afterwards, the doctor's daughter Marguerite agreed to model for him, seated at the upright piano, of which she was an accomplished player (ill. 168). This was to be Van Gogh's last ambitious figure painting, executed on another double square canvas, this time turned vertically. He emphasised a simple pink and red colour harmony set off by a green background, and tempered his brushwork to animate discreetly the large flat surfaces, clearly bearing in mind the decorative design of Japanese *kakemono* prints. When he gave the painting to the sitter, he also gave her two Japanese prints of the same size and format to hang on either side.

Although romantic biographers have sought evidence of the coming crisis, which would end Van Gogh's life, in the work he painted in Auvers, it is doubtful whether these confident, sometimes majestic, canvases should be interpreted in that way. Indeed, it is still uncertain whether Van Gogh's suicide towards the end of July was his premeditated closure on a life of increasing pain or a cry for help. He shot himself in the lower abdomen and died of his wounds two days later. The combination of factors that may have driven him to this ultimate act of violence and destruction – fear of recurring illness, anger, loneliness, despair, a sense of being an intolerable burden – are difficult to gauge today. But one cannot overlook the fact that he was all too familiar with the cruel workings of the capitalist art market and perhaps reasoned that his immediate family would only stand to gain from the upsurge in value his work would enjoy once the source of production dried up.



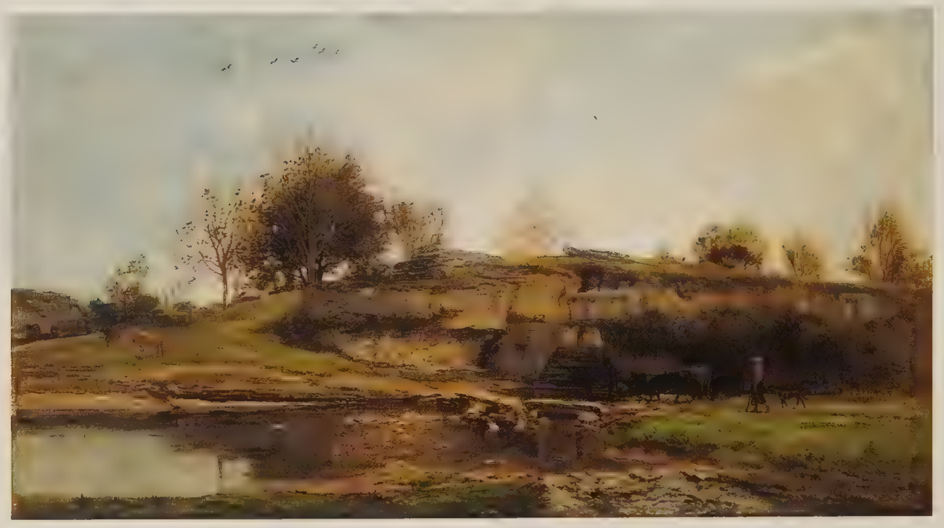






167
Portrait of Dr Gachet
1890
oil on canvas
68 x 57 cm
Musée d'Orsay, Paris

168
Mlle Gachet at the piano
1890
oil on canvas
102 x 50 cm
Kunstmuseum, Basel

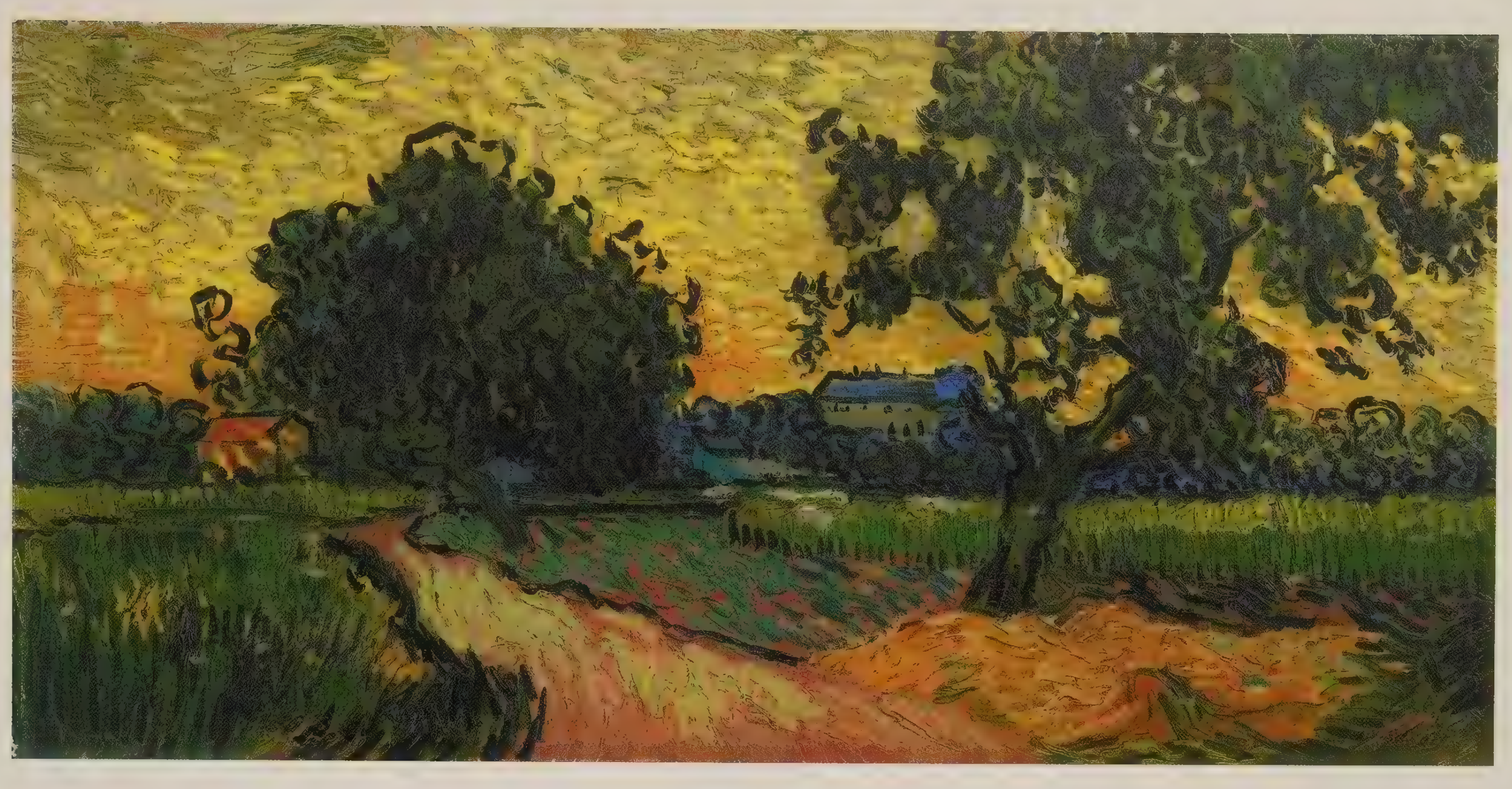


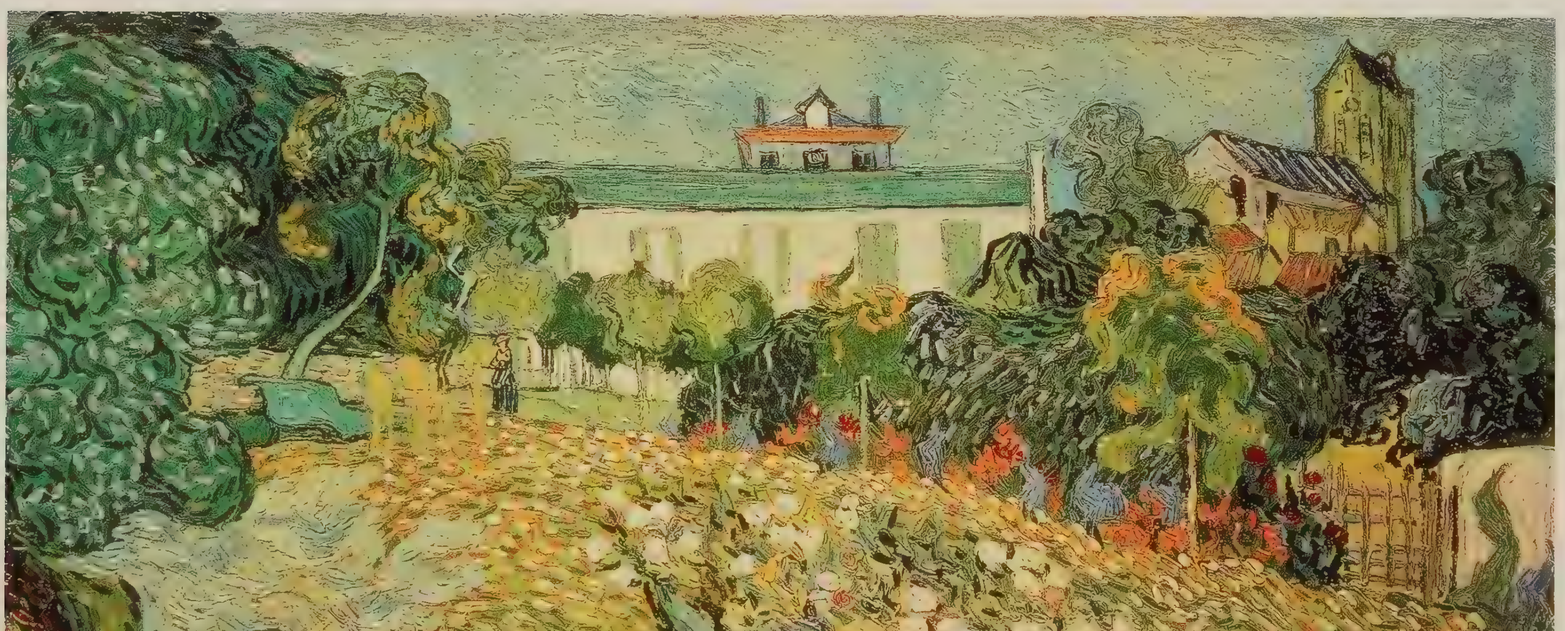
169
Charles-François Daubigny
Spring
1857
oil on canvas
96 x 193 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris
(on loan to the Musée
des Beaux-Arts, Chartres)

170
Landscape at twilight
1890
oil on canvas
50 x 101 cm
Van Gogh Museum,
Amsterdam

171
Daubigny's garden
1890
oil on canvas
53 x 104 cm
Hiroshima Museum of Art,
Hiroshima

Seeing the grouping of works assembled to pay homage to Van Gogh at the Salon des Indépendants of 1891, Octave Mirbeau (1848-1917) was profoundly moved: 'Here I feel myself in the presence of somebody loftier, more masterly, a person who disturbs me, moves me, commands attention. [...] Van Gogh possessed, to a rare degree, that which differentiates one man from another: style [...] that is to say the assertion of personality.' For this art critic, writing within a year of the artist's death, it was difficult to avoid regarding Van Gogh's case as tragic, to avoid dramatising his misfortunes: the unfair brevity of his life, the lack of recognition, the loneliness, the struggles with his medical condition. But viewed from the twenty-first century, Van Gogh's works and words urge against such an approach. The message of his remarkable body of paintings is affirmative and celebratory. During his brief decade of artistic activity Van Gogh achieved a technical facility and a level of productivity that few other artists have equalled. Yet the apparently effortless mastery of his greatest works was achieved through immense effort, a willingness to learn his trade like an apprentice who had no pretensions to innate talent. He succeeded in fusing the qualities he most admired in his native Dutch inheritance – including its moral earnestness and devotion to nature – with the colouristic and technical freedoms offered by French painting at one of the most exciting moments in its history. That fusion produced a series of paintings that are complete worlds unto themselves, masterpieces justly deserving of our astonishment and admiration.





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Suggestions for further reading

Evert van Uitert and M. Hoyle (eds.), *The Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh*, Amsterdam (Meulenhoff/Landshoff), 1987
Louis van Tilborgh and Marije Vellekoop, *Vincent van Gogh Paintings, Volume 1, Dutch Period 1881-1885*, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), 1999
Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Studio of the South*, exhib. cat. (Art Institute of Chicago and Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam), London (Thames & Hudson), 2001
Toos van Kooten and Mieke Rijnders (eds.), *The Paintings of Vincent van Gogh in the Collection of the Kröller-Müller Museum*, Otterlo (Kröller-Müller Museum), 2003
Chris Stolwijk, Sjraar van Heugten, Leo Jansen and Andreas Blühm (eds.), *Vincent's Choice: The Musée Imaginaire of Van Gogh*, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), 2003
Sjraar van Heugten, *Van Gogh: the Master Draughtsman*, Amsterdam (Van Gogh Museum), London (Thames & Hudson), 2005

Note to the reader

References to Van Gogh's letters appear with two reference numbers. The first refers to *De brieven van Vincent van Gogh*, ed. Han van Crimpen and Monique Berends-Albert, 4 vols., The Hague, 1990; the second refers to *The Complete Letters of Vincent van Gogh*, 3 vols., London (Thames & Hudson), 1958. The author is grateful to Leo Jansen and the other editors of the Van Gogh Letters Project (forthcoming) for permission to refer to the original texts of letters. It was also valuable to be able to refer to the Van Gogh website compiled and maintained by David Brooks and Bob Harrison, www.vggallery.com. Where quotations included in the text differ slightly from the above sources, they have been retranslated from the French by the author.

List of references for Van Gogh's works

References to Van Gogh's works appear with two reference numbers. The first (F) refers to J.-B. de la Faille, *The Works of Vincent van Gogh. His Paintings and Drawings*, Amsterdam, 1970; the second (JH) refers to Jan Hulsker, *The New Complete Van Gogh. Paintings, Drawings, Sketches*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 1996.

1	*Van Gogh's chair*	F 498 JH 1635
2	*Gauguin's chair*	F 499 JH 1636
4	*Old man in a tail coat*	F 960 JH 241
5	*Still life with cabbage and clogs*	F 1 JH 81
7	*Sorrowful woman*	F 935 JH 143
8	*The poor and money*	F 970 JH 222
10	*Fisherman on the beach*	F 5 JH 188
11	*Cottages*	F 17 JH 395
12	*Farm with stacks of peat*	F 22 JH 421
14	*Ploughman with woman planting potatoes*	F 172 JH 514
15	*A weaver and his loom*	F 27 JH 503
16	*Weaver*	F 1115 JH 502
18	*The potato eaters*	F 82 JH 764
20	*Head of a woman*	F 130 JH 692
21	*Reaper*	F 1318 JH 858
22	*Peasant woman digging*	F 1255 JH 826
23	*The cottage*	F 83 JH 777
24	*The vicarage garden at Nuenen*	F 185 JH 484
25	*The vicarage at Nuenen*	F 182 JH 948
26	*The vicarage at Nuenen*	F 1343 JH 475
27	*Still life with birds' nests*	F 111 JH 939
29	*Still life with earthenware and bottles*	F 53 JH 538
30	*Basket of potatoes*	F 116 JH 934
31	*The old church tower at Nuenen*	F 84 JH 772
32	*Still life with Bible*	F 117 JH 946
33	*Head of a woman*	F 206 JH 972
34	*Plaster figure of a female torso*	F 216g JH 1055
35	*View of Paris*	F 261 JH 1101
36	*Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre*	F 274 JH 1115
37	*Vegetable gardens and the Moulin de Blute-Fin on Montmartre*	F 346 JH 1244
38	*Fishing in spring, the Pont de Clichy at Asnières*	F 354 JH 1270
39	*View of Paris from Theo's apartment in the rue Lepic*	F 341 JH 1242
40	*Outskirts of Paris: road with peasant shouldering a spade*	F 361 JH 1260
41	*Courting couples in the Voyer d'Argenson Park in Asnières*	F 314 JH 1258
42	*The fortifications of Paris with houses*	F 1403 JH 1281
43	*Vase with gladioli and autumn asters*	F 248a JH 1148
44	*Flowers in a blue vase*	F 323 JH 1295
45	*Still life with plaster statuette*	F 360 JH 1349
46	*Still life with Parisian novels*	F 359 JH 1332
47	*A pair of boots*	F 255 JH 1124
48	*A pair of boots*	F 331 JH 1235
50	*Self-portrait with straw hat*	F 469 JH 1310
51	*Self-portrait*	F 345 JH 1249
52	*Self-portrait as an artist*	F 522 JH 1356
53	*Self-portrait with felt hat*	F 344 JH 1353
55	*Bridges across the Seine at Asnières*	F 301 JH 1327
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58	*Allotments on Montmartre*	F 316 JH 1246
59	*Interior of a restaurant*	F 342 JH 1256
60	*Interior of a restaurant*	F 549 JH 1572
61	*Bridge in the rain (after Hiroshige)*	F 372 JH 1297
62	*The flowering plum tree (after Hiroshige)*	F 371 JH 1296
64	*Portrait of Père Tanguy*	F 363 JH 1351
65	*Still life with quinces and lemons*	F 383 JH 1339
66	*Still life: sunflowers*	F 376 JH 1331
68	*Still life with cabbages and onions*	F 374 JH 1338
69	*Agostina Segatori in the café du Tambourin*	F 370 JH 1208
72	*Mother by a cradle: portrait of Léonie Rose Davy-Charbuy*	F 369 JH 1206
73	*The Italian woman with carnations*	F 381 JH 1355
74	*The pond in the park at Arles with the Yellow House in the background*	F 1513 JH 1412
75	*The Yellow House (The street)*	F 464 JH 1589

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F 397 JH 1368

77 *The Langlois bridge*
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78 *La Roubine du Roi*
F 427 JH 1490

79 *The pink orchard*
F 555 JH 1380

80 *Pink peach tree in blossom (Souvenir de Mauve)*
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81 *Still life with coffeepot*
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82 *Still life*
F 600 JH 1424

83 *Oleanders*
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84 *View of Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*
F 416 JH 1447

85 *Fishing boats on the beach at Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*
F 413 JH 1460

86 *White cottages at Les Saintes-Maries*
F 419 JH 1465

87 *Field with flowers near Arles*
F 409 JH 1416

88 *View of Arles*
F 1416r JH 1415

89 *The mowers*
F 545 JH 1477

91 *The harvest*
F 412 JH 1440

93 *Ploughed fields (The furrows)*
F 574 JH 1586

94 *Green vineyard*
F 475 JH 1595

95 *The sower*
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96 *The sower*
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97 *Farmhouse in Provence (The farm gate)*
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103 *The lover (Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet)*
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104 *Portrait of Joseph Roulin*
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105 *Armand Roulin*
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107 *The poet: Eugène Boch*
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109 *The poet's garden*
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110 *The starry night over the Rhône*
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F 456 JH 1561

114 *Sunflowers*
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115 *Self-portrait as bonze*
F 476 JH 1581

116 *Les Alyscamps*
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117 *Falling leaves (Les Alyscamps)*
F 486 JH 1620

118 *L'Arlésienne*
F 488 JH 1624

119 *Portrait of the artist's mother*
F 477 JH 1600

121 *L'Arlésienne (Portrait of Madame Ginoux)*
F 541 JH 1893

122 *Red vineyard at Montmajour*
F 495 JH 1626

123 *Dance hall at Arles*
F 547 JH 1652

124 *Memory of the garden at Etten*
F 496 JH 1630

127 *Self-portrait with bandaged ear*
F 529 JH 1658

128 *Still life with a plate of onions*
F 604 JH 1656

129 *La berceuse (Portrait of Madame Roulin)*
F 504 JH 1655

130 *The Tarascon diligence*
F 478a JH 1605

131 *The courtyard of the hospital*
F 519 JH 1687

132 *The hospital in Arles*
F 646 JH 1686

133 *Peach blossom in the Crau*
F 514 JH 1681

135 *A view of Arles*
F 516 JH 1685

136 *Irises*
F 608 JH 1691

137 *The road menders*
F 658 JH 1861

138 *Wheatfield with a reaper*
F 618 JH 1773

139 *Mountainous landscape behind Saint-Paul-de-Mausole*
F 611 JH 1723

140 *Almond blossom*
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141 *The garden of Saint-Paul-de-Mausole*
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142 *Pine trees at sunset*
F 652 JH 1843

143 *Wheatfield with cypresses*
F 615 JH 1755

144 *The olive trees*
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145 *The starry night*
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146 *Self-portrait*
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152 *Night (after Millet's 'La veillée')*
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153 *The raising of Lazarus*
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F 677 JH 1972

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156 *Irises*
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162 *The church at Auvers*
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168 *Mlle Gachet at the piano*
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170 *Landscape at twilight*
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171 *Daubigny's garden*
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Front cover
Vincent Van Gogh,
Fishing boats on the beach at
Les Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, 1888,
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(see p. 93).

Back cover
Vincent Van Gogh,
Self-portrait with felt hat, 1887,
Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam
(see p. 61).

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